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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Karnataka flags 14 substandard medical drugs

BENGALURU, 25 JUN

The Karnataka government's Drug Testing Laboratory declared 14 drugs manufactured by 14 different companies as "substandard" on Wednesday. The state's Food Safety and Drug Administration department has directed chemists, wholesalers, doctors, hospitals, and nursing homes not to stock, sell, or use these drugs and cosmetics, an official statement said. *—PTI*

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Majithia held for 'laundering' ₹540cr of drug money

CHANDIGARH, 25 JUNE

Senior Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader and former Punjab minister Bikram Singh Majithia was arrested on Wednesday by the Punjab Vigilance Bureau in connection with a disproportionate assets (DA) case. A raid was carried out at his residence in Amritsar, where officers seized 29 mobile phones, four laptops, two iPads, eight diaries, and various documents. A simultaneous raid was conducted at his Chandigarh residence. Majithia, brother-in-law of SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal, is already facing trial in a 2021 drugs case under the NDPS Act. He was previously jailed for over five months before securing bail in 2022. *—PTI*

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Xi, Putin to skip BRICS Summit in Brazil

BEIJING/MOSCOW, 25 JUNE

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping will not attend the upcoming BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro on 6 to 7 July, media reports confirmed on Wednesday. Putin will participate via video link, while Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will represent Russia in person, said Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov. Chinese Premier Li Qiang is expected to attend on behalf of Xi, according to the South China Morning Post, marking Xi's first absence from a BRICS summit in over a decade. China's Foreign Ministry has not yet officially confirmed this. Brazil, the current BRICS chair, is hosting the 17th summit. *—PTI*

Actor Krishna detained in cocaine case

CHENNAI, 25 JUNE

Actor Krishna has been detained by Chennai police for questioning in connection with the high-profile cocaine case involving the Tamil film industry. This follows the recent arrests of actor Srikanth and film producer Prasad, a former AIADMK functionary. Krishna, known for his role in 'Kazhugu', is being interrogated at Nungambakkam Police Station. Police have yet to confirm his exact involvement. Prasad is accused of supplying cocaine to industry figures, including Srikanth, and hosting drug-fuelled parties. He also faces charges of blackmail and running a job racket, while associate Ajay Vandiyar is under investigation for land grabbing and forgery. So far, 22 people, including police personnel, have been arrested. *—PTI*

After 40 years, Shubhanshu takes India to space

SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with the Crew Dragon capsule carrying Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla and three others lifts off from the Kennedy Space Centre, in Florida, USA

Shukla is 2nd Indian in space after Rakesh Sharma, 1st in ISS

NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW, 25 JUNE

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla on Wednesday made history as the first Indian to reach the International Space Station (ISS), launching aboard the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Florida's Kennedy Space Centre. The mission, supported by ISRO and NASA, marks India's return to human spaceflight after 41 years.

The 39-year-old Indian Air Force officer is only the second Indian in space after Rakesh Sharma's 1984 mission. With over 2,000 flying hours on aircraft including the Su-30 MKI, MiG-29, Jaguar, and Dornier-228, Shukla brings extensive aviation experience to the Axiom-4 mission.

Born on 10 October, 1985, in Lucknow, Shukla's fascination with flight began after attending an air show as a child. He studied at City Montessori School (CMS) before joining the National Defence Academy, and was commissioned into the IAF in 2006. He later earned an MTech in Aerospace Engineering from the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.

In 2019, Shukla was selected for India's Gaganyaan astronaut corps alongside test pilots Prasanth Balkrishnan Nair, Angad Pratap, and Ajit Krishnan. He underwent rigorous training at Russia's Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre and ISRO's astronaut facility in Bengaluru.

Shukla, who goes by the call sign 'Shux', is part of a four-member international crew, including commander Peggy Whitson (USA), and mission specialists Tibor Kapu (Hungary) and Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski (Poland). His crewmates describe him as "operational-savvy", "focused", and "wicked smart".

Ten minutes into launch, the astronauts began orbiting Earth, prompting Shukla to declare in Hindi: "India's human spaceflight returns after 41 years... let us embark on this journey together." His personal launch day song was 'Yun Hi Chala Chal...' from the film 'Swades', fittingly about a NASA scientist. During the 14-day mission, Shukla will conduct food and nutrition-related experiments developed by ISRO *—PTI*

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LAST SPACE JOURNEYS Poland 1978 | Hungary 1980

> **Kamaal ki ride thi (It was a great ride). We are orbiting Earth at a speed of 7.5km per second. I have the Indian tricolour embossed on my shoulders that tells me that I am with all of you**
>
> —Shubhanshu Shukla, Axiom pilot

Shubhanshu Shukla, after the Dragon spacecraft placed 200km above Earth He carries with him the wishes, hopes and aspirations of 1.4 billion Indians.
—Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

WAR ZONE

Iran Parl votes to suspend pact with UN nuke watchdog

TEHRAN, JUNE 25

A day after a US-brokered ceasefire between Iran and Israel took effect, Iran's parliament on Wednesday voted to suspend cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog, Anadolu Agency reported.

Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf announced that the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran will halt collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) "until the security of nuclear facilities is guaranteed."

The bill passed with 222 votes in favour, one abstention, and none against. However, it must still be approved by Iran's unelected Guardian Council to become law.

Under the bill, any future IAEA inspections would require clearance from Iran's Supreme National Security Council. Alireza Salimi, a member of parliament's presidium, reiterated that IAEA agents will be barred from entering the country unless national nuclear security is assured and approved by top security authorities.

The decision follows heightened regional tensions after Israeli airstrikes on Iranian military and nuclear sites on 13 June, which were met with retaliatory missile and drone attacks from Iran. The conflict escalated further when the US bombed three Iranian nuclear facilities on Sunday. US President Donald Trump later announced a ceasefire to end the 12-day confrontation. President Trump says US and Iranian officials will talk next week, continuing a dialogue that was interrupted by the war.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei confirmed Wednesday the country's nuclear facilities had been "badly damaged" in American strikes over the weekend. *—Agencies*

ZELENSKYY AND TRUMP DISCUSS WAR, SANCTIONS AT NATO SUMMIT

THE HAGUE, 25 JUNE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and US President Donald Trump held a 50-minute meeting on the sidelines of the NATO summit in The Hague on Wednesday, discussing sanctions on Russia and military aid for Kyiv.

Zelenskyy said the talks focused on achieving "real peace" and protecting Ukrainian citizens amid the ongoing war, now in its fourth year. The meeting followed a missed opportunity earlier this month when Trump left the G7 summit in Canada abruptly due to the Israel-Iran conflict.

At a press conference, Trump said he plans to speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin soon, noting, "Maybe I will talk to President Putin to end the war." He added, "Zelenskyy's a nice guy... he couldn't have been any nicer." *—PTI*

> **That hit (US strikes on Iran) ended the war. I don't want to use an example of Hiroshima. I don't want to use the example of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but it is essentially the same thing – that thing ended that war, this thing ended this war**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

3 hacked to death in Kalaburagi dhaba

KALABURAGI, 25 JUNE

Three men were allegedly hacked to death by a group of armed assailants at a dhaba near Pattan village on the outskirts of Kalaburagi city during the early hours of Wednesday, police said.

The victims are Siddaroodh, 35, who ran the dhaba, and his relatives Jagadeesh, 28, and Ramachandra alias Ramu, 35, all residents of Pattan.

At around 1.30am, a gang of 10 to 12 miscreants stormed the eatery and chased down the three men before brutally hacking them to death. The attack was swift and the assailants fled the scene within minutes, leaving behind terrified customers who fled in panic upon witnessing the gruesome murders.

Sub-Urban police arrived at the scene shortly after receiving the alert and began an investigation. Preliminary findings suggest that one of the deceased was previously accused in a murder case, leading police to suspect the incident may be linked to an old rivalry. Authorities are reviewing CCTV footage from surrounding roads and have launched a manhunt to trace the killers. A case has been registered at the Sub-Urban Police Station *—Salar News*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed that files not written in Kannada be returned and explanations sought **PHOTO: PTI**

Use Kannada or face action: Govt warns officials

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

The Karnataka government has issued a stern directive to all departments and district administrations, mandating the full use of Kannada for administrative work. Officials who fail to comply will face disciplinary action.

In a circular issued by Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh on Tuesday, the government noted persistent non-compliance despite previous instructions. "The Kannada Development Authority has repeatedly reported violations," the circular said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed that files not written in Kannada be returned and explanations sought. The circular reiterates that all officers and employees in government departments, boards, corporations, local bodies, universities, and aided institutions must strictly follow language policy guidelines.

Under the Karnataka Official Language Act, 1963, Kannada is the state's administrative language. The circular mandates that all government correspondence, including Assembly proceedings, appointments, transfers, leave orders, meeting agendas, and notices, must be in Kannada.

It criticised some Deputy Commissioners and Zilla Panchayat CEOs for issuing agendas in English during recent Karnataka Development Programme (KDP) meetings.

Government offices must also display nameplates in Kannada, and all communication—except with the central government, courts, and foreign entities—must be in the state language. Even internal correspondence and English forms must be completed in Kannada to ensure effective implementation of the language policy. *—PTI*

2 board exams for Class 10 from '26: CBSE

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

From 2026, Class-10 students will be able to take CBSE board exams twice in an academic session but it will be mandatory for them to appear for the first phase in February, officials said on Wednesday.

The second phase scheduled in May will be optional for students who wish to improve their performance, they said.

CBSE has approved the norms for conducting board exams twice a year for Class-10, a move recommended in the new National Education Policy. "The first phase will be conducted in February and second in May. The results for the two phases will be announced in April and June, respectively," CBSE Examination Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj said.

"It will be mandatory to appear for the first phase while the second phase will be optional. Students will be allowed to improve their performance in any three subjects out of science, mathematics, social science and languages," he added. *—PTI*

SC'S RS 5L FINE AFTER UP JAIL DELAYS BAIL TO MAN

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The Supreme Court on Wednesday slammed the Uttar Pradesh jail authorities for delaying the release of a man whom it granted bail on 29 April in a case under UP's anti-conversion law, and directed the state to pay him Rs 5 lakh as compensation.

A bench of Justices KV Viswanathan and N Kotiswar Singh observed that liberty was a "very valuable and precious" right guaranteed under the Constitution and the man had lost his liberty for at least 28 days due to a "non-issue".

The accused was granted bail by the apex court on 29 April and subsequently on 27 May, a trial court in Ghaziabad issued the release order.

The top court was informed on Wednesday that the man was released from district jail Ghaziabad on 24 June.

The bench took exception

WITHOUT HUSBAND'S NOD

Muslim wife has right to divorce by Khula: HC

HYDERABAD, 25 JUNE

The Telangana High Court has affirmed that a Muslim wife has the absolute right to dissolve her marriage through Khula, and her husband's consent is not required for its validity. Khula is a form of divorce initiated by a Muslim wife.

The court ruled that a Khulanama or certificate from a Mufti or Dar-ul-Qaza is not mandatory, as their opinion is merely advisory. The judgment came while hearing an appeal by Mohammed Arif Ali, who challenged a family court's rejection of his plea against a divorce certificate issued by Sada-E-Haq Sharai Council, an NGO that resolved his marital dispute after his wife, Afsarunnisa, sought Khula and he refused. The court noted that once the wife demands a Khula, it takes immediate effect if the process remains within the private, non-adjudicatory space between the spouses. The bench observed that the Quran grants Muslim women the right to seek divorce, and there is no prescribed procedure in either the Quran or Sunnah if the husband rejects it. In this case, the court found that the Khulanama followed repeated requests and failed reconciliation attempts. *—Agencies*

Pak soldier, who captured IAF pilot Abhinandan, killed

ISLAMABAD, 25 JUNE

An officer of the Pakistan Army's Special Services Group, who had claimed to have captured Indian Air Force pilot Abhinandan Varthaman after his jet was shot down in a dogfight in 2019, was killed in a clash with the Taliban militants.

Major Syed Moiz Abbas Shah, 37, was killed on 24 June in a clash with the Taliban militants in the Sararogha area of South Waziristan near the Afghan border, according to a statement by the army's Inter-Services Public Relations.

Lance Naik Jibran Ullah, 27, was also killed in the same battle.

The army troops killed 11 terrorists belonging to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and wounded seven others.

Pakistan Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir attended Moiz's funeral prayer at Chaklala Garrison in Rawalpindi. His body was flown to his native town of Chakwal in Punjab where he was laid to rest with full military honours. Commissioned into the Pakistani Army in 2011, he joined the Special Services Group and was served in the volatile Waziristan region. *—PTI*

Murder suspect's house torched in Shiggaon

HAVERI, 25 JUNE

Following the murder of local contractor Shivanand Kunnur in Shiggaon, members of his family allegedly set the house of the prime accused on fire, police said on Wednesday. Authorities confirmed that nobody was injured because nobody was in the house when it was set afire. Shivanand Kunnur, 40, was killed in public on Tuesday on his way back home from Shiggaon. Police sources said the attackers, wielding iron rods, machetes, and swords, repeatedly attacked his neck and head, and a video of the scene recorded by an onlooker has gone viral. Nagaraj Savadatti was named as the prime accused, apart from Hanumanth, Ashraf, Sudeep, and Suresh as co-conspirators. On Wednesday morning, Kunnur's family allegedly doused Nagaraj's house with petrol and set it ablaze, police said. *—PTI*

State launches 100-day campaign to solve GP issues

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

State Minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday said that the Karnataka government launched a 100-day audit resolution campaign for Gram Panchayats to address audit objections and recovery notices flagged in the audit reports of Gram Panchayats. This initiative comes in the wake of objections raised by the Karnataka Legislature's Committee on Local Bodies and Panchayat Raj Institutions. The campaign is being undertaken across all districts. The campaign came into effect from 16 June and will continue until 23 September. *—ANI*

Elder couple found dead in City's old age home

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

An elderly couple was found hanging at a senior citizens' home in City's JP Nagar on Wednesday, police said. The deceased have been identified as Krishnamurthy, 81, and his wife Radha, 74. Preliminary investigation suggests suicide, though police are probing the incident from all angles. *—ANI*

CM will speak to disgruntled MLAs: HM

Says its 'not a big deal', every govt has dissatisfied MLAs

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday expressed confidence that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will speak to disgruntled ruling Congress MLAs and resolve their issues, amid recent comments by some party legislators alleging "bribery and administrative collapse" that have caused embarrassment to the government.

Congress MLA from Kagwad, Raju Kage, had hinted at resigning, citing delays in developmental works and the release of funds, while alleging that the administration has "completely collapsed".

Additionally, Aland Congress MLA BR Patil recently alleged bribery in public housing allotments, while Sagar Congress MLA Belur Gopalakrishna demanded the resignation of Housing Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan over the allegations.

Home Minister G Parameshwara **PHOTO: PTI**

"They have raised issues concerning their constituencies, but have they raised State-level issues? They have spoken about constituency-related problems and sought the timely release of funds for development work in their segments. The Chief Minister will resolve these matters," Parameshwara said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "All MLAs have already been instructed to prepare an action plan for development works worth Rs 50 crore in their constituencies. The CM has himself assured that funds will also be provided to opposition MLAs. All MLAs, including me, are preparing an action plan for our constituencies. Can we do it without funds?"

When asked whether the Congress high command had instructed the CM to speak to disgruntled legislators, Parameshwara said, "The Chief Minister is in Delhi and has met the party leadership. I am not aware of what transpired at the meeting or whether such instructions have been given. If the CM is asked to speak to MLAs, he will do so."

When it was pointed out that the inaccessibility of ministers was a major concern for several MLAs, including Kage, he said, "Maybe personally he (Kage) might have faced it. I cannot deny it, as he has said so. The CM will sort it out."

He added that an opportunity was given to legislators at a recent Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting to raise such concerns, during which some MLAs requested that instructions be issued to ministers to meet legislators.

"It's not a big issue; we will sort it out. Such minor issues are common. In which government have legislators not been dissatisfied?" he said *—PTI*

MONSOON WOES

Flood alert in Mandya as KRS dam nears full capacity

MYSURU, 25 JUNE

A flood alert was issued by the Srirangapatna revenue office in Mandya district on Wednesday for areas along the Cauvery river and downstream areas of the Krishnarajasagar Dam, as it nears its full capacity.

On Wednesday, the dam's water capacity reached 121.40ft against a maximum of 124.80ft. As the dam's inflow increased by 50,000 cusecs following heavy rains in its catchments areas at Kodagu and discharge of water from the Hemavathi and Harangi Dams, it will reach its full capacity by 26 June.

Officials also advised people residing on both sides of the Cauvery river and in low-lying areas to move to safer locations as surplus water from the KRS dam could be released downstream any moment.

In view of the inclement weather, an order was issued restricting the entry of tourists in prominent tourist destinations like Balamuri, Yedamuri, Gosai Ghat, Nimishamba and Sriranganatha temples and Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary. People were also barred from making offerings for the dead as part of funeral rituals on the banks of the Cauvery until further orders.

Orange alert on for coastal districts

The IMD forecast heavy rains in coastal districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Uttara Kannada, and adjacent districts Belagavi, Shivamogga and Chikkamagaluru districts. It issued an orange alert for the districts till 27 June. A yellow alert was also issued for Dharwad and Kodagu districts. *—Salar News*

ED raids 18 places in engineering seat 'scam'

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted searches at 18 places in the State on Wednesday in connection with a "seat-blocking" scam in private engineering colleges in Bengaluru, sources said.

The probe agency's Bengaluru office combed the premises of the accused colleges; the trustee of BMS College and their main associates; the offices and residences of a few private education consultants; and those of a few "seat-blocking agents".

Officials of the ED said that the main accused in this case are the Bhusanayana Mukundadas Sreenivasaiah College of Engineering, Akash Institute of Engineering and Technology, and New Horizon College of Engineering.

"These colleges and their associates are suspected of being involved in financial irregularities related to the seat allocation process."

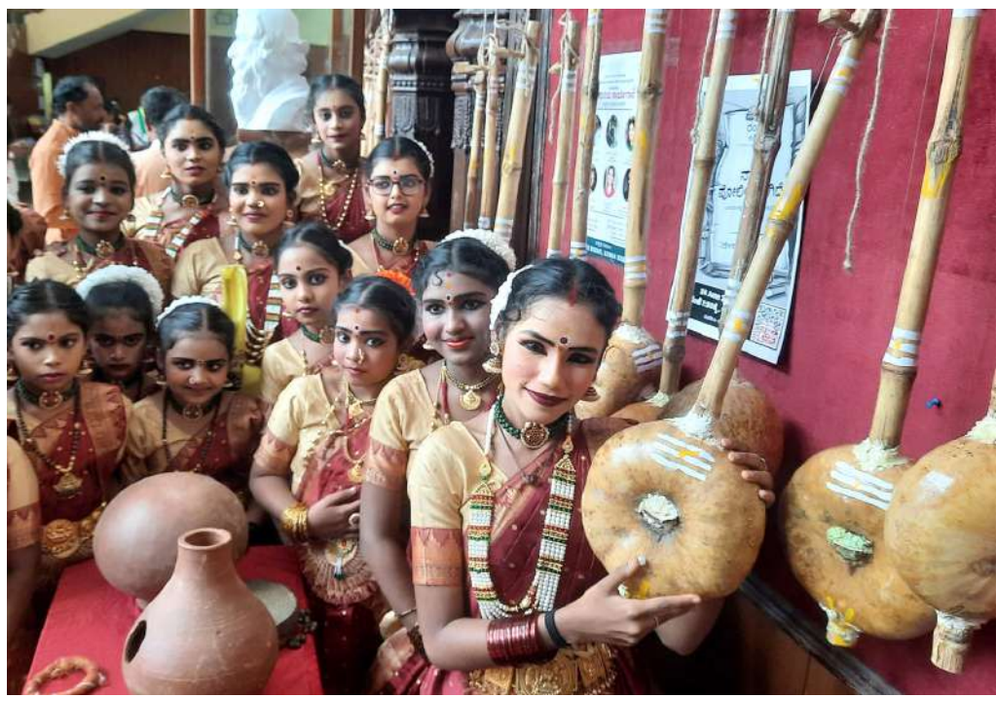
In the case, seats in private engineering colleges were allegedly being blocked, possibly to be later sold at a premium, depriving deserving candidates of fair admission opportunities.

The colleges or their promoters could not be contacted for a comment on these charges and the ED action against them.

The investigation is being conducted under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, they said. *—PTI/ANI*

- The probe agency's Bengaluru office combed the premises of the accused colleges; the trustee of BMS College and their main associates; the offices and residences of a few private education consultants; and those of a few "seat-blocking agents".

CELEBRATING HERITAGE



Folk artists during State's first Kannada Janapada conference, at Ravindra Kalakshetra in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

KSDL to expand into European markets

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited (KSDL) plans to further expand the reach of products like Mysore Sandal Soap and shower gels into European markets, Minister for Large and Medium Industries MB Patil said on Wednesday.

Patil said this during the British High Commissioner to India, Lindy Cameron, and Deputy High Commissioner for Karnataka and Kerala, Chandru Iyer's visit to KSDL.

"KSDL currently exports its products to 23 countries. We now plan to further expand the reach of products like Mysore Sandal Soap and shower gels into European markets," Patil said.

Cooperation from UK would be helpful in, he said.

Cameron noted that the India and UK's Free Trade Agreement would benefit the State. *—PTI*

British High Commissioner to India Lindy Cameron, State Minister MB Patil and others at KSDL **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

State govt flags 14 substandard drugs

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

The Karnataka government's Drug Testing Laboratory declared 14 drugs manufactured by as many different companies as "substandard" on Wednesday.

The state's Food Safety and Drug Administration department has directed chemists, wholesalers, doctors, hospitals and nursing homes not to stock, sell or use these drugs and cosmetics, a government statement said.

"In case they hold any stock, they are requested to inform the concerned area Drugs Inspector or Assistant Drugs Controller. The public is also advised not to use these drugs or cosmetics," the statement added.

The substandard drugs include compound sodium lactate injection IP (Ringer-Lactate solution for injection) manufactured by Ultra Laboratories and Tam Bran Pharmaceuticals; Pomol-650 by Aban Pharmaceuticals and MITO Q7 Syrup by Bion Therapeutics India among others.

The department has urged strict compliance with these directions to safeguard public health.

'CM's govt is democratic, not authoritarian'

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Minister Sharanprakash Patil on Wednesday said the Congress-led State government under Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is a model of vibrant democracy, in contrast to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "authoritarian regime".

"This is a Congress government where anyone can raise their voice. It is not a Modi-style authoritarian administration," said Patil, who holds the medical education, skill development, entrepreneurship, and livelihood portfolios, and is the Raichur district in-charge minister.

]Patil defended legislators who questioned the CM. "There's nothing wrong in demanding grants. That's how a vibrant democracy functions." *—Salar News*

World Bank gives $426M for City's water security

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

The World Bank has approved a USD 426 million loan to boost water security and climate resilience for over four million residents in Bengaluru, officials announced on Wednesday.

The Karnataka Water Security and Resilience Programme aims to enhance the city's capacity to manage floods by rejuvenating 183 lakes, which serve as natural buffers during heavy rainfall.

The programme will also strengthen early warning systems and emergency response mechanisms through the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre, said task team leaders Kristoffer Welsien and Anup Karanth.

World Bank India Country Director Auguste Tano Kouame said the initiative would help increase the revenues of the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) and mobilise USD 5 million in private investment. Key goals include replacing ageing pipelines, enhancing operational efficiency, and deploying smart water meters through private sector innovation.

The project will provide sewerage connections to over 1,00,000 households and facilitate the construction of nine new Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) to prevent untreated waste from entering the city's lakes and drains.

Treated wastewater will be reused for industrial purposes and groundwater recharge across Greater Bengaluru.

The loan, sanctioned by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), has a 20-year maturity period with a five-year grace period. *—PTI*

Namma Yatri launches drivers' welfare trust

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Mobility platform Namma Yatri on Wednesday announced the launch of the Namma Driver Welfare Trust, a community-powered initiative aimed at ensuring the well-being of its drivers.

Namma Yatri, built on the Open Network for Digital Commerce, said the trust will be funded through a fixed contribution of two per cent of its revenue.

The trust is designed as a legally registered, independently governed entity aimed at providing sustained financial and social support to drivers and their families, beyond incentives and performance metrics.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy said, "The launch of the Namma Driver Welfare Trust is a commendable initiative – one that recognises the hard work of these drivers and provides them with greater security and support."

In the release, Namma Yatri added it offers a transparent, commission-free ecosystem that ensures "affordable, reliable, and sustainable transportation solutions." *—PTI*

'NOT A LUXURY'

Bike taxis a necessity: Petitioners in HC

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Petitioners challenging the State's blanket ban on bike taxis in Karnataka High Court on Wednesday said that the service plays a vital role in urban mobility and must be allowed to operate under existing legal provisions. "They are a necessity, not a luxury," they said.

A Division Bench comprising Acting Chief Justice V Kameswar Rao and Justice CM Joshi was hearing appeals filed by ride-hailing platforms Ola, Uber, and Rapido, as well as bike taxi owners and associations, against an earlier ruling by a single judge that effectively outlawed bike taxi operations in the State.

Advocate Shashank Garg, representing the Bike Taxi Welfare Association, contended that bike taxis serve as an essential function in easing traffic congestion and providing last-mile connectivity.

Citing the State's 2021 E-Bike Taxi Policy, Garg argued that State had already laid the groundwork for such services, and its reversal in 2024 seemed politically motivated.

Garg said the State had the authority to regulate fares. "Bike taxis are often the only mode of transport that can navigate congested areas or reach places inaccessible to cars and even ambulances."

Senior advocate Dayan Chinnappa, representing individual bike owners Varikruti Mahendra Reddy and Madhu Kiran, questioned the legality of the State's decision.

Citing Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to practice any profession, he said, "If the rules permit bike taxis, the State cannot refuse permits arbitrarily. That would be a direct violation of fundamental rights."

The next hearing is scheduled for 2 July *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Achuthanandan's health condition remains critical

T'PURAM, 25 JUNE

Former Kerala chief minister and CPM veteran VS Achuthanandan's health condition remained critical on Wednesday, two days after he was rushed to a private hospital in state capital after a cardiac arrest. The hospital said, there has been no change in his health condition. Achuthanandan, 101, continues to be in intensive care, and a team of specialists is attending to him, the statement said. Earlier, CPM state secretary MV Govindan said Achuthanandan's condition was stable and showed slight improvement, compared to the day he was admitted. Congress sources said Leader of the Opposition VD Satheesan would visit Achuthanandan at the hospital soon. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan also visited him and held discussions with his family members on Tuesday. *—PTI*

Lalu's 'disowned' son clears Stage 1 for pilot training

PATNA, 25 JUNE

Former Bihar minister Tej Pratap Yadav, who was recently expelled from the party by his father and RJD founding president Lalu Prasad, has cleared the interview for initial stage of pilot training in a commercial pilot license (CPL) course. According to the list of successful candidates released by the Directorate of Aviation (Bihar government) on 20 June, Yadav has secured the fifth rank among 18 candidates who cleared the interview and document verification process for Ab-Initio to the CPL course. Yadav was expelled from RJD on 25 May by his father for six years a day after he reportedly confessed to being "in a relationship" with a woman named Anushka. Prasad also rapped him for his "irresponsible behaviour". *—PTI*

Agra to rename Fatehabad town, Badshahi Bagh

AGRA, 25 JUNE

The Agra zila panchayat has decided to change the names of Fatehabad town and the Badshahi Bagh area of town to Sindoorpuram and Brahmapuram, respectively. A proposal on it was put forth by zila panchayat chairperson Manju Bhadoria and passed unanimously during a board meeting on Monday. It will now be sent to state government for approval. Bhadoria said the proposal advocated for name changes as it "symbolised slavery". The town used to be called Samugarh in the past and was later changed to Fatehabad, the proposal said, suggesting that it be renamed as Sindoorpuram.
It also said that Badshahi Bagh area in Fatehabad could be renamed as Brahmapuram after Brahmos missile and Lord Brahma. *—PTI*

Assam-Meghalaya border mob clash over plantation

SHILLONG/GUWAHATI, 25 JUNE

A mob on Wednesday uprooted saplings and dismantled wooden structures erected to protect plants, leading to tension in a village on disputed Assam-Meghalaya border, officials said. Around 400 people of Lapangap and other villages, backed by members of several social organisations of Meghalaya, went to plantation area on Wednesday, uprooted the are around 11am, claiming Assam was trying to encroach into their state by carrying out the plantation. To control irate villagers from Assam side, who were clashing with those from Meghalaya, the Assam Police fired tear gas shells and rubber bullets, a senior official said. *—PTI*

Darkest chapter: PM on Emergency

Modi says Cong placed democracy under arrest

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

As the country commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Emergency, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asserted it was one of the "darkest chapters" in India's democratic history and slammed the then Congress government, saying it placed "democracy under arrest."

Top leaders of the BJP and key ally JD(U) led the charge against Congress with Modi saying no Indian will ever forget the manner in which the spirit of the Constitution was violated during the Emergency.

Modi also affirmed his government's commitment to strengthening constitutional principles.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi
PHOTO: PTI

Union Cabinet at its meeting presided by Modi adopted a resolution against the Emergency and resolved to commemorate and honour the sacrifices of countless individuals who valiantly resisted the measure and its attempt at subversion of the spirit of Indian Constitution. It also observed a two-minute silence as a mark of tribute to them.

Congress on its part launched a counter attack on Modi government, alleging that over the past eleven years, Indian democracy has been under a "systematic and dangerous" five-fold assault that can be best described as "Undeclared Emergency@11".

Coinciding with the 50th anniversary, a book which highlights Modi's fight for "the ideals of democracy" was released by Home Minister Amit Shah. *—PTI*

Union cabinet to honour emergency victims

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, observed a two-minute silence on Wednesday to honour victims of the Emergency, when democratic rights were suspended, and civil liberties curtailed. Marking 50 years since what it termed Samvidhan Hatya Diwas, the Cabinet paid tribute to those who resisted authoritarian rule, including the suppression of the 1974 Navnirman Andolan and Sampoorna Kranti movement. *—Agencies*

BJP doing drama to hide failure: Cong

Kharge says EC is 'puppet' in govt hands

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

An undeclared emergency is prevailing in the country for the last 11 years, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge claimed on Wednesday while accusing the BJP of staging a "drama" of observing "Samvidhan Hatya Diwas" to mark the Emergency proclamation to hide governance failure.

He also alleged that the Election Commission has become a "puppet" in the hands of the government and it is not the BJP which is winning elections but its machinery.

Kharge said if there is any threat to democracy and the Constitution, it is from the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge
PHOTO: PTI

Hitting back at Modi over his jibes on the 50th anniversary of the Emergency, he said a government which has no tolerance and does not allow fraternity and liberty to prosper has no right to lecture others.

Addressing a press conference at the Congress headquarters Indira Bhawan here, Kharge slammed the BJP-RSS for raking up the Emergency 50 years after it was proclaimed, and said those who "played no role in the independence of the country, in framing the Constitution, and rejected Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution" are now talking of saving the Constitution.

Kharge claimed the Constitution is in danger because of Modi and his governance. *—PTI*

> **This day tells us that when power becomes dictatorial, the people have the power to overthrow it**
>
> -Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

> **The throttling of the freedom of expression during the Emergency was a symbolic of the dictatorial streak in the government of the day**
>
> -Nitish Kumar, Bihar Chief Minister

> **My father neither regretted delivering the judgment, for he did what was right. For him it was yet another case; he decided on merit and facts**
>
> -Vipin Sinha, Justice (retired)

Majithia held for 'laundering' ₹540 cr

CHANDIGARH, 25 JUNE

The Punjab Vigilance Bureau on Wednesday arrested senior Akali leader Bikram Singh Majithia for allegedly laundering more than Rs 540 crore of "drug money".

Former minister Majithia's arrest came after a vigilance team conducted a raid at his residence in Amritsar.

The bureau claimed preliminary investigations revealed that more than Rs 540 crore of "drug money" has been laundered through several channels allegedly facilitated by Majithia.

A spokesperson of the bureau said in a statement that assets, both movable and immovable, in the names of Majithia and his wife Ganieve Kaur Majithia increased substantially, for which no legitimate sources of income were provided. During the raid, the vigilance team from Mohali faced protests by Majithia and his wife Ganieve Kaur, an Akali MLA, who accused the officers of barging into their house in Green Avenue on Wednesday morning.

Shiromani Akali Dal workers stage a protest against the Punjab government outside the residence of SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia, in Amritsar, on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

Sukhbir Badal, his wife and former Union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal, and many senior Akali leaders also lashed out at the AAP government in Punjab over the raid at Majithia's residence, calling it a "political vendetta". A similar raid was conducted at the couple's Chandigarh residence as well, sources said.

The bureau seized more than 30 mobile phones, five laptops, three iPads, two desktops, several diaries, property-related documents, and documents related to Saraya Industries during the raid, sources said.

FIR said, Majithia accumulated vast wealth, properties and business interests grossly disproportionate to his legitimate sources of income. *—PTI*

ED raids 4 states in Rs 100 cr cyber 'fraud'

AHMEDABAD, 25 JUNE

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday conducted searches in Gujarat and Maharashtra as part of a money laundering probe against fraudsters, who allegedly committed cyber crimes like digital arrests and illegally transferred funds of more than Rs 100 crore abroad, official sources said.

The raids were conducted in Surat and Ahmedabad in Gujarat and in Mumbai by the Ahmedabad zonal office of the federal probe agency under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

The money laundering case stems from a 2024 Gujarat Police FIR against Makbul Doctor, Kaashif Doctor, Bassam Doctor, Mahesh Mafatlal Desai, Maaz Abdul Raheem Nada and some others, the sources said.

The accused are alleged to have been involved in cheating the general public through various cyber frauds such as fake USDT trading, digital arrests, threatening innocent individuals by sending fake notices of law enforcement agencies etc., they said.

Additionally, ED also conducted searches at multiple premises in Delhi-NCR and Punjab as part an investigation linked to an alleged Rs 988 crore bank loan fraud case, sources said.

The action targeted at the promoters of a company, Shilpi Cables Technologies Ltd, and some linked entities. Nine premises in Delhi-NCR and one in Jalandhar were part of the searches being conducted, the sources said. *—PTI*

'COUNTRY FIRST, PARTY LATER'

Kharge slams Tharoor's praise for Modi

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge took a veiled swipe at party MP Shashi Tharoor on Wednesday, criticising his praise for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomacy following Operation Sindoor.

Asked about Tharoor's recent article lauding Modi's global outreach, Kharge quipped, "I can't read English well. His language is very good—that's why we've made him a member of the Congress Working Committee." He added pointedly, "We say 'country first, party later'. But some say 'Modi first, country later'."

Tharoor responded on X with a cryptic post: "Don't ask permission to fly. The wings are yours. And the sky belongs to no one…", accompanied by an image of a bird in flight. The message was widely interpreted as a declaration of independence and resilience amid mounting criticism from his own party.

In his article published in The Hindu, Tharoor described Modi's energy and global presence as a "prime asset" for India, calling Op Sindoor's diplomatic effort a moment of national unity.

The rift underscores deeper tensions within the Congress as it grapples with internal dissent and its stance on foreign policy. *—PTI*

JUDGES, ACTIVISTS TARGETS

PFI's hit list had 972 people from Kerala: NIA to court

KOCHI, 25 JUNE

Banned Popular Front of India (PFI) had a hit list of around 972 people, including a former District Judge of Kerala, according to documents submitted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in a court here recently.

According to these NIA documents, PFI, through their secret "Reporters wing" "collected and maintained the personal details of the people of other communities, including their position, name, age, photo, etc".

The NIA has claimed that PFI had three wings – "Reporters Wing", "Physical and Arms Training Wing/PE", and "Service Wing/Hit teams."

"Through the 'Reporters Wing', a quasi-intelligence division of the PFI, it collected private and personal information of prominent personalities in the society, besides leaders of other communities, especially the Hindu community, including their day-to-day activities", the documents claimed.

The NIA has claimed that PFI had three wings – Reporters Wing, Physical and Arms Training Wing/PE, and Service Wing/Hit teams.
PHOTO: PTI

- 23 department websites have so far been re-activated

The content of the documents was mentioned in the Special NIA Court's order dismissing the bail plea of some of the accused in the 2022 SK Sreenivasan murder case.

The central government had in September 2022 banned PFI and several of its associates for five years under a stringent anti-terror law, accusing them of having "links" with global terror groups like ISIS.

He expressed regret that many government websites could not be accessed due to the transfer of websites from the existing server host Ctrl-S Data Centre to a more secure Google Virtual Private Server (VPS). Judges, activists were also targets of PFI.

He said that 23 department websites have so far been re-activated. *—PTI*

Kejriwal hails bypoll wins as 2027 semifinals

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday described the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) victories in the recent assembly bypolls in Gujarat and Punjab as a "semifinal" ahead of the 2027 state elections.

Speaking at a celebration event, he asserted that AAP would surpass 100 seats in Punjab—up from 92 in 2022—and form the next government in Gujarat.

Kejriwal praised winners Gopal Italia (Visavadar, Gujarat) and Sanjeev Arora (Ludhiana West, Punjab), claiming a strong pro-incumbency wave in Punjab.

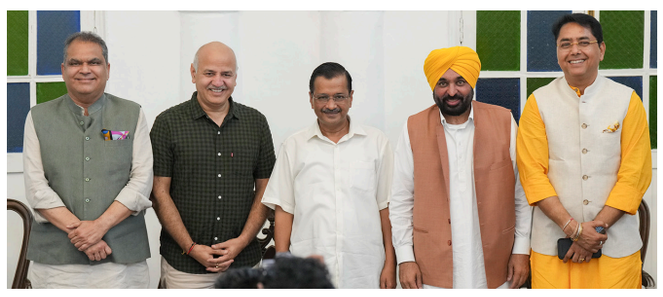
He also criticised Congress for allegedly aligning with the BJP, positioning AAP as the only credible alternative offering clean politics.

Simultaneously, the Election Commission of India launched ECINET, a digital platform enabling faster release of post-election data.

The Commission published comprehensive index cards—containing candidate-wise vote shares, gender voting patterns, and party performance—within 72 hours of the 19 June bypolls.

Previously, such reports took weeks or months to compile manually.

The bypolls, held across constituencies in Gujarat, Punjab, Kerala, and West Bengal, concluded on 23 June. *—PTI*



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann, party's in-charge for Punjab Manish Sisodia, Punjab AAP Prez Aman Arora, and party leader Sanjeev Arora, in New Delhi, on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

Cong wants machine-readable copy of voter lists

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The Congress on Wednesday urged the Election Commission to provide machine-readable digital copy of the Maharashtra voter lists along with video footage of polling day of the state and Haryana within a week. The demand came days after the Election Commission's offer to Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi to meet and discuss issues raised by him regarding the 2024 Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha election. The Empowered Action Group of Leaders and Experts (EAGLE) grouping of the Congress, in a letter to the Election Commission (EC), said the party leadership will be happy to meet it soon after they receive the voter lists and the video footage so that they can also present the findings of their analysis *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Four dead, three injured in Delhi factory fire

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Four people have died and at least three were injured in a fire that broke out in a five-storey building in Delhi's Rohini Sector-5 on Tuesday evening. The blaze, which began near Rithala Metro Station, prompted the deployment of 16 fire engines. The building housed several small manufacturing units, including plastic bag production and disposable goods storage. Three charred bodies were recovered from the first floor early Wednesday, with a fourth found later. Among the injured, Nitin Bansal, 31, and Rakesh, 30, suffered 80 per cent burns, while Virender, 25, sustained minor injuries. Firefighters brought the blaze under control on the lower floors by morning. Investigations are on to ascertain the cause of the fire. *—PTI*

Accused gets 3-month furlough in Katara murder

NEW DELHIM, 25 JUNE

The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted a three-month furlough to Sukhdev Yadav in the 2002 Nitish Katara murder case. A bench of noted Yadav had served 20 years in jail without remission. He must be produced before the trial court within seven days, which will impose conditions for release. Yadav had challenged a Delhi High Court order from November 2024 that denied him three weeks of furlough. Katara was abducted and killed by Vikas and Vishal Yadav, with Sukhdev's help, over his relationship with their sister Bharti Yadav, daughter of politician DP Yadav. The court termed the murder an honour killing driven by caste differences. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Several injured in leopard attack in UP

LAKHIMPUR KHERI, 25 JUNE

A man was injured in a leopard attack near Baburi village in the Dhaurahra range of Uttar Pradesh's North Kheri Forest Division. Mihilal, 35 was working near a brick kiln on 24 June when a four-year-old leopard, hiding nearby, attacked him and tried to drag him towards a banana orchard. Mihilal bravely fought back, grabbing the leopard by the neck. A viral video shows villagers rushing in to help. The leopard injured several people, including a forest guard and a police officer. Forest officials tranquilised the animal, which is now under observation. All injured are stable. In a separate incident, a sick leopard was rescued in Jatpurwa village. *—PTI*

UP girl dies as hospital insists on payment

HAPUR, 25 JUNE

A five-year-old girl, Amreen died at a private hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Pilkhuwa, after being denied treatment for not paying Rs 20,000 upfront. Her daily wage worker parents, Anwer and Mousami had rushed her to Saraswati Hospital on 20 June. The doctors refused to treat the child when they couldn't afford the quoted amount and advised them to take her to a government hospital. The delay allegedly led to her death. Hapur's chief medical officer, Sunil Tyagi, issued a notice and launched an investigation. BJP leader Mohammad Danish called the incident "inhuman" and has urged Union Health Minister JP Nadda to take strong action against the hospital. *—PTI*

Lucknow revels as city boy rockets to space

Air show in childhood ignited passion to fly

LUCKNOW, 25 JUNE

Chants of "Hip Hip Hurray", spontaneous bhangra, and quiet tears marked a morning of pride and celebration at City Montessori School (CMS), as Lucknow boy and Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla lifted off into space and into history, aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida.

As the rocket pierced the skies, Shukla became the second Indian to travel to space after Rakesh Sharma in 1984, and the first to reach the International Space Station. His parents, Shambhu and Asha Shukla, watched the launch with pride at CMS's World Unity Convention Centre in Lucknow alongside defence personnel, faculty, and students.

"My blessings are always with my son," said his father. "I know he will be successful," added his mother, Asha.

His sister, Suchi Shukla, recalled the early spark: a childhood air show that first ignited his fascination with flying. "It's a proud moment for India – this journey carries the blessings of a billion Indians," she said.

Shukla's posters adorned Lucknow as CMS transformed into a mini space hub for Vyomotsav, a live AXIOM mission broadcast and celebration of his achievement.

CMS founder Bharti Gandhi called his spaceflight "a beacon of possibility for every Indian child".

A chance NDA application set him on this path. "One of his friends was overage and offered Shubhanshu the form. That's how it began," recalled his father, who admitted the family had once hoped he would join civil services.

The CMS is also where he met his wife Kamna.

The couple have a six-year-old son, Kiash. "Even if you go to him with 400 kg of stress, you'll come back lighter," his father said fondly. *—PTI*

Family members of astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla react as they watch the take off on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

"As Group Captain Subhanshu Shukla creates a new milestone in space for India, the whole nation is excited and proud of an Indian's journey into the stars – Draupadi Murmu, President of India

"From conquering the skies to touching the stars - a journey powered by the indomitable spirit of the IAF Air Warrior. Group Captain Shubahanshu Shukla sets forth on a landmark Space Mission, carrying the pride of the nation beyond Earth — IAF

Heavy rain triggers flood fears in Kerala

WAYANAD/ JAMMU/ KOLKATA, 25 JUNE

- Local residents believe new landslides to have occurred uphill near Punchirimattam inside forested areas, though there was no confirmation. District administration officials said the there was no immediate danger

Heavy rains have raised fears of fresh flooding and landslides in Mundakkai-Chooralmala region in Kerala's Wayanad.

The Chooralmala river is in strong spate, with muddy water flowing forcefully and breaching the banks near the Bailey bridge.

Soil stored along both riverbanks for renovation work has been washed away, causing water to spill onto the Attamala road and surrounding areas.

Local residents believe new landslides to have occurred uphill near Punchirimattam inside forested areas, though there was no confirmation.

District administration officials said the there was no immediate danger and the situation was being monitored.

The Kabani river's water levels rose at Mananthavady and Panamaram.

With the Banasura dam nearing full capacity, a red alert remains in place for nearby regions. An orange alert was issued for 11 districts, including Wayanad.

Light rain and gusty winds were expected in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, and Alappuzha.

Meanwhile, nine men were rescued on Wednesday by the police, traffic cops, State Disaster Response Force and local volunteers after they were trapped in the Tawi river following a sudden rise in the water level due to rains that lashed many parts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Light to moderate rain and thundershowers were predicted at a few places of Jammu division till 27 June.

Heavy rains were predicted in several West Bengal districts including Purulia, Bankura, West Burdwan, East and West Midnapore, Jhargram, South 24 Parganas, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar till 1 July. *—PTI*

Free mats stolen after Andhra's Yoga Day world record

VISAKHAPATNAM, 25 JUNE

On International Day of Yoga 2025, Visakhapatnam set a new Guinness World Record with over three lakh participants gathered at RK Beach. Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the session, joined by Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan, and other dignitaries. However, post-event scenes turned chaotic as locals rushed to grab free yoga mats distributed at the venue. A viral video showed people pushing, shoving, and fighting, with many hoarding multiple mats before fleeing. Social media erupted with criticism, with users slamming the lack of civic sense and mocking the irony of such behaviour following a yoga event. One user quipped, "Let's announce this as a new tradition."

Others questioned whether people had only attended for the freebies. The incident has sparked a wider conversation on public conduct and event management at mass gatherings in India. *—Agencies*

AFTER MUCH DELAY,
AXIOM-4
FINALLY TAKES OFF
Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4) is a private spaceflight to the International Space Station (ISS), operated by Axiom Space in collaboration with SpaceX, ISRO and NASA. It launched aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 Block 5 rocket carrying the Crew Dragon C213. India's Subhanshu Shukla with 3 others embarked on the fourth spaceflight to the ISS after many delays.
HERE ARE THE DETAILS
LIFT OFF: 25 June 12.01 pm IST
LOCATION: Launch Complex 39A at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida
28 hrs needed to reach ISS
14 days: Duration of the mission
CREW
Tibor Kapu, Hungary
Pilot Shubhanshu Shukla, India
Commander Peggy Whitson, US
ESA Astronaut Stawosz Uznański-Wiśniewski, Poland
MISSION OBJECTIVE
60 EXPERIMENTS FROM 31 COUNTRIES WILL BE CONDUCTED IN LOW EARTH ORBIT.
KEY EXPERIMENTS INCLUDE:
The mission is a crucial step in India's Gaganyaan programme, serving as a preparatory mission for sending Indian astronauts to space.
Impact of microgravity radiation on edible microalgae.
Sprouting salad seeds in space.
Investigate the survival, revival and reproduction of tardigrades.
Examine the effects of metabolic supplements on muscle regeneration.
Analyse human interaction with electronic displays.
Investigate cyanobacteria on urea and nitrate in microgravity.
Study impact on growth and yield of food crop seeds.
Impact of space travel on diabetic people.
DELAY AFTER DELAY
29 MAY Delayed due to issues with mission readiness.
8 JUNE Technical issues in rocket leads to delay.
10 JUNE Delayed due to bad weather.
11 JUNE Liquid oxygen leak in the rocket.
19 JUNE Bad weather and crew health.
20 JUNE Time needed to check repairs.
THE FALCON-9 ROCKET
It is a reusable two-stage rocket.
Uses nine Merlin engines in first stage, and one in second stage.
Weight: 5,49,054kg
Height: 70m
This is its 486th missions.
Can carry seven passengers.
The Falcon-9 rocket has a dragon capsule, which is made by SpaceX
COST
India paid Rs 550 crore as its share for the mission
JOY: THE 5TH CREW MEMBER
The crew will take along a 5-inch, plush baby swan, named 'Joy' to space.
'Joy' is a zero-gravity indicator.
Shukla said that in the Hindu mythology, the swan represents the goddess Saraswati's vehicle. In Poland too, the swan is a symbol of grace, beauty and wisdom, and in Hungary, many traditional folklores have connected the swan to journeys beyond the Earth's realm.
WHO IS SHUBHANSHU SHUKLA?
1. The-39-year-old IAF pilot will be the second Indian to travel to space after Rakesh Sharma.
2. Born in Lucknow, Shukla has 2,000 hours of flight experience.
3. He is also set to take part in ISRO's maiden spaceflight mission, Gaganyaan.
4. Shukla will conduct 7 experiments for nutritional research in space
5. He'll be carrying mango nectar, moong dal-carrot halwa, and souvenirs from students.
RESEARCH: SAARIYAH IRAM

Aurangzeb tomb row: 9 riot accused get bail

NAGPUR, 25 JUNE

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday granted bail to nine persons arrested in connection with the riots in Nagpur witnessed in March this year against demands seeking removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district.

Justice Urmila Joshi-Phalke of the Nagpur bench of the high court granted bail to the accused noting that their custody was not required any further.

Advocate Mohammad Aadil Sheikh, appearing for one of the accused, had argued that the probe in the case was complete and hence the accused should be granted bail.

The accused who have been granted bail are Iqbal Ansari, Ejaz Ansari, Absar Ansari, Izhar Ansari, Ashfaqulla Aminullah, Muzzamil Ansari, Mohammad Rahil, Mohammad Yasir and Iftekar Ansari.

Large-scale stone pelting and arson were reported in several parts of Nagpur on March 17 after rumours began circulating about a 'chadar' with holy inscriptions being burnt during protests led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) seeking the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb located at Khultabad town in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district. Thirty-three police personnelwere injured and 123 personswere arrested by the Nagpur police following the riots. *—PTI*

'PERSISTENT INEQUITIES'

15L children in India not vaccinated: Study

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

PHOTO: FREEPIK

India figures among many South Asian nations reported as critically lax in childhood vaccine, with over 15 lakh children classified as "zero-dose" in 2023, revealed a Lancet study.

The study is based on the Global Burden of Disease 2023 data and looks at vaccine coverage in 204 countries between 1980 and 2023. It focuses on 11 key vaccines recommended for all children, including those that protect against diphtheria, measles, polio, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and rotavirus.

The study found that in 2023, there were 1.57 crore children – 15 lakh in India – who had received no doses of diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis vaccine in their first year.

An international team of researchers forming the 'Global Burden of Diseases 2023 Vaccine Coverage Collaborators' updated global, regional, and national estimates of routine childhood vaccine coverage from 1980 to 2023 for 204 countries and territories.

Persistent global inequalities, challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and growth of vaccine misinformation and hesitancy contributed to faltering immunisation progress.

The study highlighted the critical need for targeted improvements to ensure that all children benefit from life-saving immunisations.

The team analysed data pertaining to 11 vaccine-dose combinations recommended by the World Health Organization.

Between 1980 and 2023, global vaccine coverage doubled against several diseases.

Zero-dose children fell by 75 per cent, from 58.8 million in 1980 to 14.7 million in 2019.

Measles vaccination rates fell in 100 of 204 countries between 2010 and 2019, while 21 of 36 high-income countries experienced declines in coverage for at least one vaccine dose against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, measles, polio, or tuberculosis, the researchers said. *—PTI*

Police arrested Taufeeq on charges of pushing Neha off the roof of her house in Delhi on Monday *PHOTO: X*

Burqa-clad jilted lover throws woman off roof

NEW DELHI, 23 JUNE

A 26-year-old man, disguised in a burqa, allegedly killed a 19-year-old woman by pushing her off the roof of her house after an argument broke out between them in northeast Delhi's Ashok Nagar, a police official said on Wednesday. The man has been arrested, the official said.

Taufeeq, resident of Rampur, in Uttar Pradesh, was arrested late night on Tuesday for allegedly pushing the young woman from the rooftop on Monday morning, the official said.

Police said the two were in a relationship and the woman was upset that the man was marrying another woman.

The woman's parents said nothing less than death penalty would bring justice to their daughter.

"My daughter should not have died like this. The man who did this should be punished in the same way. He should feel the same pain," said Surendra the victim's father. *—PTI*

EMERGENCY@50

Indira Gandhi has a legacy beyond BJP's propaganda

RAMESH BABU

When the Emergency was declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 25 June, 1975, it was a moment that would forever be remembered in Indian political history. However, decades later, the interpretation of this event continues to be deeply polarised. While BJP has consistently attempted to use the Emergency as a political weapon to discredit the Congress legacy, the people of India delivered their own verdict-first in 1977, and even more significantly, in 1980.

Emergency in context

The Emergency, lasting from 1975 to 1977, was imposed in the backdrop of increasing political unrest, economic instability, external threats, and an adverse court judgment. While civil liberties were curbed and political opponents jailed, there were also notable achievements during this period: the country witnessed strict discipline in administration, improvements in law and order, progress in family planning, and efficiency in public services.

Though the Emergency is often painted in dark tones, it's essential to remember that it was imposed in accordance with constitutional provisions available at the time. The decisions taken, whether right or wrong, must be seen in the context of an evolving democracy dealing with multiple challenges.

1977: A setback, not a rejection

In 1977, after lifting the Emergency and calling for general elections, Indira faced a major defeat. The Janata Party came to power, securing a majority. However, it would be a mistake to interpret this solely as a national rejection of Indira's leadership. The anti-Congress alliance was a conglomeration of disparate groups, united primarily by opposition to her rule rather than any cohesive ideology or policy vision. Congress still secured 154 Lok Sabha seats and garnered 34.52 per cent of the popular vote, a significant share even in defeat. This clearly indicated that a large portion of the electorate still had faith in Indira Gandhi's leadership.

1980: The people restore her mandate

Just three years later, in the 1980 general elections, the people of India voted overwhelmingly to bring Indira back to power. The Janata Party, plagued by internal conflicts, policy paralysis, and leadership struggles, had failed to deliver on its promises. Indira Gandhi's comeback was not merely political-it was symbolic of the public's renewed trust in her ability to provide decisive leadership and national stability.

Her return to power reaffirmed that the Indian electorate is mature, discerning, and capable of reassessing its choices. If the Emergency was seen as an error, the people believed it was not one that defined Indira Gandhi's entire legacy. Her role in strengthening India's global position, leading during the 1971 war, and standing firm in difficult times weighed far more heavily in the minds of the public.

BJP's continual focus on the Emergency

Today, decades after the event, BJP continues to highlight the Emergency to target Congress and Indira's legacy. However, it's important to ask-why does a party that has ruled India for a decade still feel the need to evoke an incident from 50 years ago? The answer is simple: the Emergency is used as a rhetorical tool to delegitimise Congress, particularly when BJP struggles to address present-day issues like inflation, unemployment, or democratic backsliding.

Ironically, while attacking Indira, BJP often overlooks the people's democratic decision in 1980. The voters of India had every right and power to permanently reject her leadership if they wished-but they didn't. In fact, they gave her an even stronger mandate than before. Today, the BJP continues to rake up the Emergency every year to tarnish Indira's name. But this effort is deeply political and lacks historical balance. BJP, which had no major role in India's independence movement or early nation-building, seeks to discredit the Congress and its legacy, especially when it has no answers to rising unemployment, inflation, or communal polarization under its own rule.

Let history judge, not political propaganda

Indira Gandhi's enduring popularity and comeback cannot be erased by one-sided narratives. Rather than recycling the Emergency as a political weapon, it is time for parties to focus on present governance challenges. The people of India are capable of remembering history, but they also know how to move forward. And in 1980, they chose to do just that—with Indira leading the way.

Indira, India's first and only woman prime minister to date, remains one of the most iconic and transformative figures in Indian history. Her tenure as the Prime Minister of India from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 until her tragic assassination in 1984 was marked by bold decisions, fierce leadership, global recognition, and an unshakable commitment to India's unity and development. Her legacy cannot be judged through the lens of one chapter alone.

Former PM Indira Gandhi nationalised 14 major banks PHOTO: PTI

Instead, her overall contribution to India's political, economic, and strategic foundation remains unmatched, and the people of India, through democratic means, vindicated her leadership time and again.

A visionary and decisive leader

Indira Gandhi inherited a nation facing food shortages, political instability, poverty, and economic stagnation. Yet she took charge with firm determination and introduced policies that forever altered India's trajectory.

- Green Revolution: Under her leadership, India overcame chronic food shortages through the Green Revolution, making the country self-sufficient in food grain production and reducing dependency on foreign aid.
- Nationalisation of Banks (1969): With a bold move, she nationalised 14 major banks, democratising access to credit, especially for farmers, women, and the rural poor. This act brought financial inclusion to the forefront of policy.
- Abolition of privy purses: Indira decisively ended the princely privileges, integrating former royal families completely into the Indian Republic, reinforcing the principles of democracy and equality.

Champion of India's sovereignty

- 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War: Her leadership during the Indo-Pak war of 1971 was historic. She extended unwavering support to Bangladesh's freedom struggle, resulting in the creation of a new nation. India's victory not only demonstrated military strength but also humanitarian leadership, as millions of refugees were given shelter.
- Non-Aligned Movement: As a staunch supporter of the Non-Aligned Movement, she preserved India's independent foreign policy during the Cold War, ensuring India was never reduced to a pawn in superpower politics.
- Pokhran nuclear test (1974): Under her leadership, India tested its first nuclear device, affirming the nation's scientific prowess and strategic autonomy. This bold move, despite global opposition, established India as a nuclear-capable power.

1980's comeback: People's verdict in her favour

After the Janata Party experiment failed due to internal bickering and ineffective governance, people longed for strong leadership. In the 1980 Lok Sabha elections, Indira Gandhi returned triumphantly with a clear mandate. Her return proved that the Indian people still trusted her vision, strength, and commitment to national unity.

She resumed office with a renewed focus on stability, poverty eradication, and national security. The Congress government under her again became a source of confidence and order in a chaotic political landscape.

Indira Gandhi had an extraordinary connect with the masses. She could resonate with the poor, the women, the farmers, and the working class. Her slogans like "Garibi Hatao" were not just electoral tools but reflected her genuine concern for India's marginalized communities.

Her charisma, courage, and style of governance earned her the title of "Iron Lady of India." She broke the glass ceiling in Indian politics and inspired generations of women across the country and beyond.

Instead of focusing on present challenges, BJP finds comfort in weaponizing the past. However, the Indian people know their history-and they also know how to differentiate between propaganda and reality.

Indira Gandhi was not just a prime minister, she was a force of nature. And history will remember her not for a period of Emergency, but for a lifetime of service to the Indian nation.

The author's views are personal.
Ramesh Babu is an-ex-MLC and Chairman of KPCC Media & Communication Department

SALAR سالار

Iranian-backed hackers go to work after US strikes

Tehran-linked cyber groups have launched attacks on US banks, defence firms, and oil companies following American strikes on Iranian nuclear sites, sparking warnings of escalating digital warfare.

Cyberattacks by groups aligned with Iran have intensified in recent days, targeting aviation firms, financial institutions, and energy companies in retaliation for US military action against Iranian nuclear facilities. While these intrusions have so far caused minimal disruption to critical infrastructure, experts warn the situation could deteriorate if the fragile ceasefire between Iran and Israel collapses.

According to analysts, hacker groups affiliated with or sympathetic to Iran may widen their campaigns against American targets, potentially triggering broader conflict in the digital realm. Arnie Bellini, a tech entrepreneur and investor, says the US's reliance on digital systems leaves it exposed.

"We've demonstrated overwhelming strength in kinetic warfare," said Bellini, CEO of Bellini Capital. "But digitally, we're like Swiss cheese, full of holes. It's an open invitation to cyberwarfare."

Attacks already underway

Two pro-Palestinian hacker groups have claimed responsibility for attacks on more than a dozen firms, including banks and oil companies. These cyberattacks, mostly denial-of-service (DDoS) strikes intended to overwhelm websites and networks, were detailed in posts on Telegram and confirmed by the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors online extremist activity.

"We increase attacks from today," one group, known as Mysterious Team, wrote on Monday.

In response, US federal agencies have issued warnings and increased their vigilance. The Department of Homeland Security released a bulletin on Sunday highlighting the elevated Iranian cyber threat, while the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has urged operators of critical systems, including water supplies, power grids and pipelines, to remain on high alert.

Though Iran lacks the sophisticated cyber capabilities of China or Russia, it has earned a reputation as a "chaos agent" in cyberspace, launching disruptive attacks, stealing data, and using cyber tools to exert political influence.

Whether Tehran continues its cyber operations will depend on diplomatic developments. If the ceasefire with Israel holds, the Iranian regime may choose to pull back. However, independent or loosely affiliated hacker groups could continue their campaigns regardless.

Researchers at cybersecurity firm Trustwave have identified over 60 such groups that support Iran's strategic objectives. Some are directly tied to Iranian military or intelligence agencies, while others act independently, motivated by ideology or opportunity.

One example cited by Trustwave's Ziv Mador occurred after Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023, when hackers hijacked an Israeli emergency alert system to falsely warn of a nuclear missile strike.

"It causes an immediate psychological impact," said Mador, Vice President of Security Research at Trustwave SpiderLabs. "The aim is disruption, confusion and fear. We saw the same strategy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict."

Cyber espionage and intelligence gathering

In addition to destructive attacks, Iran is also believed to be stepping up its efforts in cyber espionage. Analysts warn that Tehran will likely attempt to spy on foreign political leaders to better understand US and Israeli intentions.

Jake Williams, a former NSA cybersecurity expert now with Hunter Strategy in Washington, said Iran's limited cyber resources are being used strategically.

"It's fairly certain these resources are being directed at intelligence collection, not mass destruction, to figure out what the US or Israel might do next," said Williams.

Last year, US authorities charged three Iranian hackers with attempting to infiltrate Donald Trump's presidential campaign, underscoring Tehran's interest in US political manoeuvres.

Cybersecurity cuts raise alarm

These developments come amid concerns over the Trump administration's reductions in cybersecurity funding and staffing. CISA has reportedly furloughed personnel who worked on election security and slashed funding for local and state-level cyber defences.

Furthermore, intelligence agencies such as the CIA and NSA have experienced cutbacks, and Trump recently fired General Timothy Haugh, head of the NSA and US Cyber Command.

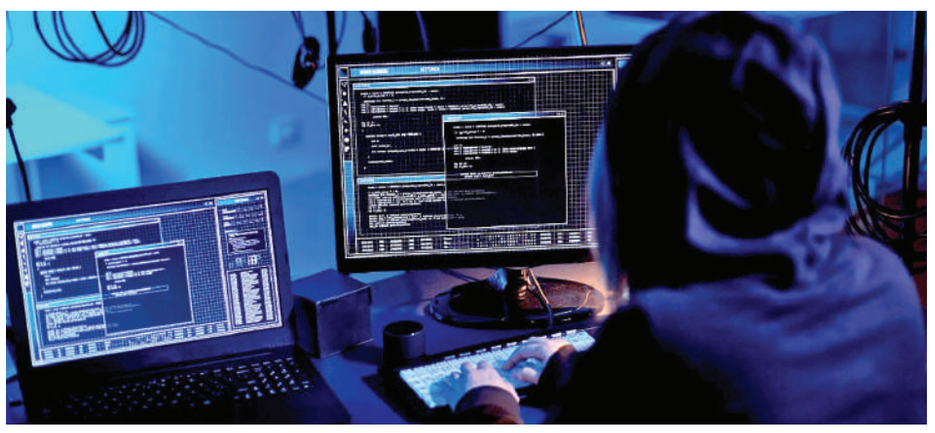
Experts say the ongoing Iran-Israel conflict underscores the urgent need for renewed investment in cybersecurity, both defensive and offensive. Mador notes that Israel's recent precision strikes on Iranian nuclear scientists were likely aided by high-level cyber-espionage and intelligence gathering.

Bellini argues that bolstering America's cyber resilience will require long-term investments, particularly in education and secure digital infrastructure. He recently donated $40 million to help build a cybersecurity research centre at the University of South Florida.

"There's a new arms race, but in cyberspace," Bellini said.

"This is Wile E Coyote vs. the Road Runner. It will go back and forth endlessly, and we can't afford to lose."

—PTI



In addition to destructive attacks, Iran is also believed to be stepping up its efforts in cyber espionage PHOTO: WIKICOMMONS

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Inside Trump's whirlwind 48 hours to secure Israel-Iran ceasefire

In a dramatic 48-hour stretch marked by frantic diplomacy, fiery rhetoric, and last-minute reversals, President Donald Trump brokered a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Iran. What began as a volatile standoff with missile exchanges and military strikes gradually shifted to diplomacy, underpinned by quiet mediation from Qatar and some very public pressure from Trump himself.

"This is a War that could have gone on for years, and destroyed the entire Middle East, but it didn't, and never will!" Trump declared on his social media platform after announcing the ceasefire.

The agreement followed US airstrikes on three major Iranian nuclear sites, action that reportedly degraded Iran's nuclear capabilities and prompted a measured Iranian response that Trump and his aides interpreted as a potential opening for negotiations.

An uneasy start

The ceasefire began taking shape early Sunday morning after the US military strikes. Trump immediately called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, telling him not to expect further US military involvement and pressing the case for a diplomatic pause.

According to a senior White House official, Netanyahu did not offer enthusiastic agreement but acknowledged that Israel had largely met its immediate military goals. Trump made it clear the US wanted to halt escalation and re-engage diplomatically with Tehran.

At the same time, Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, reached out to Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi with a blunt message: the US had demonstrated its military might and wanted peace. On Fox News' 'The Ingraham Angle', Witkoff later said the administration was pursuing "a comprehensive peace agreement that goes beyond even the ceasefire."

"We're already talking to each other," Witkoff said. "I think the conversations are promising."

Quiet mediation, strategic restraint

Behind the scenes, Qatar played a key role. After Iran launched a retaliatory missile attack on a major US base in Qatar, where 13 of the 14 missiles were intercepted, Qatari leaders saw an opportunity. Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said Iran had quietly tipped off the US and Qatar ahead of the attack, allowing forces to take cover and civilian airspace to be cleared.

Trump and Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, held a "long call" in which the emir relayed Iran's readiness to consider a ceasefire, provided Israel halted its bombing campaign. From there, Trump doubled down, contacting Netanyahu again to lock in Israel's agreement, conditional on Iran ceasing further attacks.

A heavily damaged building stands in a residential area a day after a direct missile strike, launched from Iran, following the announcement of a ceasefire, in Beersheba, Israel on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

By Monday evening, with Vice President JD Vance appearing live on Fox News, Trump took to Truth Social to announce the ceasefire was in place and would take effect "over the coming day."

Confusion and continued attacks

But even as Trump celebrated, the ceasefire's reality remained uncertain. Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi posted that no formal agreement had been signed, but that Iran would stop retaliatory attacks if Israel ceased its strikes by 4am Tehran time Tuesday.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei remained silent on the ceasefire but issued a defiant post: "Iran will not surrender."

Hours after Trump's announcement, both countries launched fresh attacks. Israel struck central Tehran, reportedly killing hundreds of Basij and Iranian security personnel, while Iran launched missiles into Israeli territory after the 4 a.m. deadline had passed.

Iranian media reported nine deaths in northern Gilan province and the destruction of several residential buildings, confirming the intensity of the Israeli assault.

Trump's fury and last-minute diplomacy

As he prepared to depart for the NATO summit in the Netherlands, Trump vented his frustration on the White House lawn.

"I'm not happy with them. I'm not happy with Iran, either, but I'm really unhappy with Israel going out this morning," he told reporters. "We basically have two countries that have been fighting so long and so hard that they don't know what the f— they're doing."

Soon after, he posted a warning on Truth Social directed at Netanyahu:

"ISRAEL. DO NOT DROP THOSE BOMBS. IF YOU DO IT IS A MAJOR VIOLATION. BRING YOUR PILOTS HOME, NOW!"

From aboard Air Force One, Trump called Netanyahu again. According to a White House official, the president was "exceptionally firm and direct" in demanding Israel stop further attacks. Netanyahu appeared to heed the message. His office later confirmed that Israel had "refrained from additional attacks" after Trump's intervention.

Ceasefire confirmed

Shortly thereafter, Trump declared on social media that the ceasefire was "in effect" and that Israeli aircraft were "turning around" in a "friendly plane wave" to Iran. He claimed that "Nobody will be hurt" and that hostilities were over.

"It was my great honour to destroy all nuclear facilities and capability, and then, STOP THE WAR!" Trump wrote mid-flight.

The ceasefire, while still fragile, marked a significant shift in the Israel-Iran conflict and demonstrated Trump's willingness to pressure even close allies like Israel to de-escalate. Whether the deal holds remains to be seen, but for now, Trump is treating it as a personal diplomatic triumph — a whirlwind result from 48 hours of improvisation, pressure, and political brinksmanship. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Israel kills key Hezbollah financier close to Iran

TEL AVIV, 25 JUNE

The IDF said Wednesday it had killed a key Hezbollah financial operative who worked closely with Iran, revealing new details about how the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps moves money to the terror group. Haytham Abdullah Bakri, head of the "Al-Sadiq" Currency Exchange in southern Lebanon, was eliminated in an Israeli Air Force strike on Tuesday. According to the IDF, Bakri played a central role in Hezbollah's financial operations, acting as a conduit for funds transferred from the IRGC's Quds Force. *—PTI*

Qatar summons Iranian envoy, mulls legal action

DOHA, 25 JUNE

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar summoned the Ambassador of Iran to Qatar, Ali Salehabadi. Qatar had strongly condemned Iran's Monday attack on the US Al-Udeid Air Base. The Qatari Foreign Affairs Minister, Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi, during the meeting emphasised the "inconsistency" of the violation with the principles of good neighbourliness and the longstanding close relations between Qatar and Iran. Al Muraikhi also stressed the urgent need to return to dialogue and diplomatic channels to resolve disputes and prevent further escalation. Qatar is also pursuing legal action against Iran for the strikes. *—PTI*

World Bank grants $1B for Iraq, Syria and Lebanon

ISLAMABAD/BEIRUT, 25 JUNE

The World Bank said on Wednesday it approved over USD 1 billion dollars for infrastructure and reconstruction projects in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The biggest amount went to Iraq, where the World Bank approved USD 930 million to help improve the country's railway infrastructure, boost domestic trade, create jobs and diversify the economy. The World Bank also approved for war-torn Syria a USD 146 million grant and USD 250 million for Lebanon. Pakistan signed a USD 350 million loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to boost women's financial inclusion and economic empowerment, according to Radio Pakistan. The agreement, under the Women Inclusive Finance (WIF) Sector Development Programme was inked on Tuesday by Sabina Qureshi, Additional Secretary of the Economic Affairs Division, and Dinesh Raj Shiwakoti, Head Project Administration Unit, Radio Pakistan reported. *—PTI*

B'desh poll panel reinstates Jamaat registration

DHAKA, 25 JUNE

Bangladesh Election Commission has reinstated the registration and symbol of the rightwing Jamaat-e-Islami party, clearing the way for its participation in future elections, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported. The announcement was made on Tuesday through a gazette notification signed by Senior Secretary of Election Commission Akhtar Ahmed, the report said. Also on Wednesday, Bangladesh's former chief election commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal was arrested, days after his predecessor KM Nurul Huda was taken into custody on charges of election manipulation during the Sheikh Hasina regime. "(Police's) detective branch arrested him around 2pm from the Mogbazar area (in the capital)," Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Deputy Commissioner Talebur Rahman said. Awal is the second former election commission chief to be arrested this week. *—PTI*

'US strikes only halted Iran's nuke plans'

US intel report contradicts Trump's claim of erasing nuke sites, White House calls it 'fake'

Satellite images show the damage at Iran's Fordow and Isfahan nuclear sites *PHOTO: X*

WASHINGTON, 25 JUNE

A new US intelligence report found that Iran's nuclear programme has been set back only for a few months after US' strikes and was not "completely and fully obliterated" as President Donald Trump has said, according to two people familiar with the early assessment.

The intelligence report issued by the Defence Intelligence Agency on Monday contradicts statements from Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about the status of Iran's nuclear facilities. However, the sources were not authorised to speak about it publicly and spoke anonymously.

The report found that while the Saturday strikes at the Fordo, Natanz and Isfahan nuclear sites did significant damage, they were not totally destroyed, the sources said.

The assessment found that at least some of Iran's highly enriched uranium was moved out of multiple sites prior to the US strikes and survived. The report also found that Iran's centrifuges are largely intact, the sources added.

At the deeply buried Fordo uranium enrichment plant, the entrance collapsed and infrastructure was damaged, so that will take time to fix, but the underground infrastructure was not destroyed, one of the sources said. The source added that previous assessments had warned of this outcome at Fordo.

The intelligence assessment was first reported by CNN on Tuesday.

The White House strongly pushed back on the assessment, calling it "flat-out wrong."

"The leaking of this alleged assessment is a clear attempt to demean Trump and discredit the brave fighter pilots who conducted a perfectly executed mission to obliterate Iran's nuclear program," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement. "Everyone knows what happens when you drop fourteen 30,000 pound bombs perfectly on their targets: total obliteration."

Meanwhile, Trump has told Israel not to expect further American offensive military action. *—PTI*

'Pak making a nuclear missile that can reach the US'

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

The Pakistani military is secretively developing a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that could reach the United States, according to intelligence agencies in Washington.

The Foreign Affairs article, quoting US sources, said if Pakistan acquires such a missile, Washington would designate the country as a nuclear adversary.

In acquiring such a capability, Pakistan could be seeking to deter the US from either trying to destroy its arsenal or intervening on India's behalf in a future Indian-Pakistani conflict.

ICBMs, which can be armed with both nuclear and conventional warheads, are capable of hitting targets over 5,500km. Currently, Pakistan has no ICBMs. *—Agencies*

IRAN EXECUTES 3 MORE MOSSAD SPIES, DETAINS 700

Iran executed three more prisoners Wednesday over allegedly spying for Israel, its state-run IRNA news agency reported, the latest hangings connected to its war with Israel. The hangings happened in Urmia Prison in Iran's West Azerbaijan province, which is the country's most northwest province. IRNA cited Iran's judiciary for the news, saying the men had been accused of bringing "assassination equipment" into the country. Additionally, as many as 700 people have been arrested for ties with Israel, the state-affiliated Nournews reported.

FOR 33 YRS, BIBI SAID IRAN IS NUKE-READY

PM Benjamin Netantyahu justified Israel's aggression against Iran by claiming that Tehran was just "months away" from building a nuclear bomb. However, this isn't the first time he has made such claims. Here's a look at his decade-long claims:

1992
"Within 3 to 5 years... Iran will become autonomous in its ability to develop a nuclear bomb."

2002
He told a US Congressional committee that Iraq must be invaded and claimed both Iraq and Iran were racing to obtain nuclear weapons.

2009
WikiLeaks revealed him telling US Congress that Iran was just one or two years away from nuclear capability.

2012
At UN General Assembly, he said Iran would have a nuclear capability "by next summer".

2015
"Iran is weeks away from having an entire arsenal of nuclear bombs".

2018
Shows "Iran's secret nuclear files", claiming that they will soon build a bomb.

2025
Bombs Iran, saying they were "months away" from launching a nuclear bomb towards Israel.

Fake news CNN, together with the failing New York Times, have teamed up in an attempt to demean one of the most successful military strikes in history. The nuclear sites in Iran are completely destroyed!

—Donald Trump, US President

For dozens of years, I promised you that Iran would not have nuclear weapons and indeed ... we brought to ruin Iran's nuclear programme

—Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel Prime Minister

President Donald Trump with NATO heads of state and government during a group photo in The Hague on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

NATO leaders agree to hike defence spending

THE HAGUE, 25 JUNE

NATO leaders agreed on Wednesday on a massive hike in defence spending after pressure from US President Donald Trump, and expressed their "ironclad commitment" to come to each other's aid if attacked.

The 32 leaders endorsed a final summit statement saying: "Allies commit to invest 5 per cent of GDP annually on core defence requirements as well as defence- and security-related spending by 2035 to ensure our individual and collective obligations."

Spain had already officially announced that it cannot meet the target, and others have voiced reservations, but the investment pledge includes a review of spending in 2029 to monitor progress and reassess the security threat posed by Russia.

The leaders also underlined their "ironclad commitment" to NATO's collective security guarantee – "that an attack on one is an attack on all." Ahead of the summit, Trump had again raised doubts over whether the United States would defend its allies.

The show of unity vindicated NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte's billing of the summit as "transformational," even though it papered over divisions. The spending pledge sets European allies and Canada on a steep path toward significant military investment.

The spending hike requires each countries to spend billions of dollars. It comes as the United States shifts its attention away from Europe to focus on security priorities elsewhere, notably in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific. *—PTI*

UK says it will buy F-35 jets capable of carrying nukes

THE HAGUE, 25 JUNE

Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced at the NATO summit that the UK will buy 12 US-made F-35 fighter jets capable of carrying nuclear bombs, joining NATO's shared airborne nuclear mission, in a major expansion of its nuclear deterrent.

The UK phased out air-dropped atomic weapons in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War. Its nuclear arsenal now consists of submarine-based missiles.

Only three NATO members – the US, Britain and France – are nuclear powers, while seven nations contribute to the alliance's nuclear mission by contributing jets that can carry either conventional weapons or American B61 bombs stockpiled in Europe.

Starmer also announced that the UK will provide 350 air defence missiles to Ukraine, funded by 70 million Pounds (USD 95 million) raised from interest on seized Russian assets. *—PTI*

Drone debris suggests Russia using Iranian tech

MOSCOW, 25 JUNE

Last week, Ukrainian drone hunters picking up the debris from Russia's nightly assault on their cities found a weapon that stood out from the rest.

It had an advanced camera, a computing platform powered by artificial intelligence and a radio link, allowing an operator to pilot it remotely from Russia.

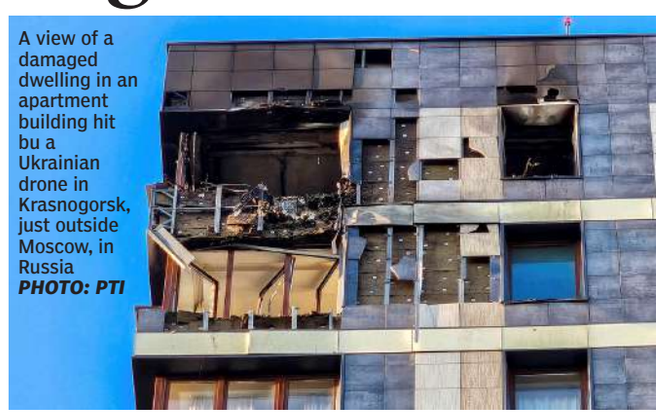
It also contained new, Iranian-made, anti-jamming technology, according to a Ukrainian drone expert.

Most Russian attack drones are black, said Serhii Beskrestnov, an electronics expert more widely known as Flash. The new one, he told the Associated Press, was white.

Inside, there were no markings or labels consistent with Russian-made drones. Instead, the stickers followed a "standard Iran labelling system," Beskrestnov said.

Experts who spoke to AP said the labels are not conclusive proof but the English-language words are consistent with how Iran marks its drones. It is quite possible, they said, that it was sold by Iran to Russia to test in combat.

Moscow has pummelled Ukraine almost nightly with Iranian-designed drones throughout the course of the war, now in its fourth year. They swarm above Ukrainian cities, their moped-like sound filling the air, as air defences and sharpshooters take aim. While some carry warheads, many are decoys. *—PTI*



A view of a damaged dwelling in an apartment building hit bu a Ukrainian drone in Krasnogorsk, just outside Moscow, in Russia *PHOTO: PTI*

Zelenskyy to let tribunal charge Russia

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is expected to formally approve plans to set up a new international court to prosecute senior Russian officials for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The special tribunal will be created through an agreement between Ukraine and the Council of Europe, the continent's top human rights body. Existing international courts, including the International Criminal Court in The Hague, lack jurisdiction to prosecute Russian nationals "crime of aggression". The institution will be funded by supporting countries known as the Core Group, including the Netherlands, Japan and Canada. The Biden administration had backed the organisation, but the Trump administration does not.

DISASTER DEBUT

Elon Musk's 'robotaxis' come under fire for reckless driving

WASHINGTON, 25 JUNE

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said Tuesday that it has asked Tesla for information about the apparent errors *PHOTO*:X

Federal traffic safety regulators are looking into suspected problems with Elon Musk's test run of self-driving robotaxis in Texas after videos surfaced showing them braking suddenly or going straight through an intersection from a turning lane and driving down the wrong side of the road.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said Tuesday that it has asked Tesla for information about the apparent errors. Though many other videos show robotaxis driving perfectly, if regulators find any major issues, that would likely raise questions about Musk's repeated statements that the robotaxis are safe and his claim that Tesla will dominate a future in which nearly all cars on road will have no one behind the wheel — or even need a steering wheel at all.

Passengers in Tesla robotaxis on the road in Austin, Texas, have generally been impressed, and the stock rose 8 per cent Monday. Investors grew more cautious Tuesday after news of NHTSA's inquiry, and the stock fell more than 2 per cent.

In one video, a Tesla moves into a lane with a big yellow arrow indicating it is for left turns only but then goes straight through the intersection instead, entering an opposing lane on the other side. *—PTI*

Explosion in vehicle kills seven Israeli soldiers in Gaza

JERUSALEM/ WASHINGTON, 25 JUNE

Seven Israeli soldiers were killed in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis when an explosive device affixed to their armoured vehicle detonated, an Israeli military official said on Wednesday. Also in the area of Khan Younis, one soldier was seriously wounded on Tuesday by weapons fire, the military said.

Al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing, said on its Telegram channel it had ambushed Israeli soldiers taking cover inside a residential building Tuesday in the southern Gaza Strip.

Some soldiers were killed and other injured after they were targeted by a Yassin 105 missile and another missile at the south of Khan Younis, Hamas said. It was not immediately clear whether the two incidents were the same. *—PTI*

Indian-American Mamdani wins NYC mayoral primary

NEW YORK, 25 JUNE

Indian-American Zohran Mamdani declared victory in New York City's Democratic Mayoral primary Tuesday night after Andrew Cuomo conceded the race in a stunning upset, as the young, progressive upstart built a substantial lead over the more experienced but scandal-scarred former governor.

Though the race's ultimate outcome will still be decided by a ranked choice count, Mamdani, a 33-year-old democratic socialist who was virtually unknown outside of political circles a year ago, was in a commanding position.

In a speech to supporters, Mamdani said, "Tonight, we made history."

"I will be your Democratic nominee for the mayor of New York City," he said.

Cuomo, who was trying to make a comeback from a sexual harassment scandal, told supporters that he had called Mamdani to congratulate him.

Mamdani would be the city's first Muslim and Indian American Mayor if elected. Incumbent Mayor Eric Adams skipped the primary. He's running as an independent in the general election. Cuomo also has the option of running in the general election.

Mamdani is the son of filmmaker Mira Nair and Mahmood Mamdani, an Indian-Ugandan postcolonial studies professor at Columbia University. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gold price slips ₹300 to ₹98,600/10g

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Gold prices slipped Rs 300 to Rs 98,600 per 10g in the national capital on Wednesday due to unabated selling by stockists in line with weak global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 98,900 per 10g on Tuesday. Extending the losses for the fifth straight session, gold of 99.5 per cent purity dipped by Rs 250 to Rs 98,050 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes). Meanwhile, silver prices also plunged by Rs 1,100 to Rs 1,03,100 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday. Spot gold in the overseas markets went lower marginally to USD 3,322.56 per ounce.—*PTI*

Rupee falls 2P to close at 86.07 against USD

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

The rupee gave up its gains and settled for the day lower by 2 paise at 86.07 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, on recovery in global crude oil prices and the US Dollar index. A strong show in the domestic equity markets prevented steep losses in the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.00 against the US dollar and traded in the range of 85.79-86.14 before settling at 86.07 (provisional), down 2 paise from its previous close. Ceasefire between Israel and Iran has led to rise in risk appetite. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading up 0.24 per cent at 98.09.—*PTI*

CIL's coking coal output falls 9% in May

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

State-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) saw its coking coal production fall by 8.7 per cent to 4.53 million tonnes (MT) in May, down from 4.96 MT in May 2024. Output in April-May also dipped 3.4 per cent year-on-year to 9.36 MT. This comes as the government pushes its 'Mission Coking Coal' to raise domestic production to 140 MT by 2029-30, aiming to cut reliance on imports for the steel industry. Coking coal, vital for steelmaking, is largely produced by CIL subsidiaries such as BCCL and CCL. India imported 57.58 MT of coking coal last year. Efforts to improve coal washing and adopt advanced coke oven technologies are ongoing to make domestic coal suitable for steel production and enhance energy efficiency. —*PTI*

Tata Play's FY25 loss mounts to ₹529 crore

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Tata Play, formerly known as Tata Sky, has reported widening of consolidated loss to Rs 529.43 crore for FY25, as it competes with other DTH operators including DishTV, Airtel Digital TV, and DD Free Dish. The company had incurred a net loss of Rs 353.88 crore in FY24. The revenue from operations declined 5.15 per cent to Rs 4,082.5 crore in FY25. The reasons for the company's widening loss could not be immediately known. The total income, which includes other income, was also down 5.03 per cent to Rs 4,109.3 crore in last financial year, according to financial data accessed by business intelligence platform Tofler. Tata Play's advertising promotional expenses were down 29.2 per cent to Rs 124.28 crore in FY25, as against Rs 175.54 crore a year before. Total expenses were 3 per cent lower at Rs 4,619.22 crore. However, the company reduced its net debt to Rs 3,445.60 crore in FY25 from Rs 4,010.21 crore a year ago. —*PTI*

Markets log gains for 2nd day amid global tensions

Sensex jumps by 700.4 pts while Nifty climbs by 200.4 pts

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged nearly 1 per cent on Wednesday, powered by widespread buying and a positive trend in global equities amid easing tensions in the Middle East following a ceasefire between Iran and Israel.

Besides, intense buying market heavyweights HDFC Bank, Infosys and Reliance Industries supported domestic equities, traders said.

Extending its previous day's rally, the 30-share Sensex jumped 700.40 points or 0.85 per cent to settle at 82,755.51. During the day, it surged 760.8 points or 0.92 per cent to 82,815.91.

As many as 2,821 stocks advanced while 1,207 declined and 134 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Similarly, the wider gauge NSE Nifty climbed 200.40 points or 0.80 per cent to 25,244.75.

From the Sensex pack, Titan, Mahindra & Mahindra, Infosys, Power Grid, Tata Consultancy Services and Bharti Airtel were among the major gainers.

As many as 2,821 stocks advanced while 1,207 declined and 134 remained unchanged on the BSE PHOTO: PTI

On the other hand, Bharat Electronics, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Axis Bank were the laggards.

Meanwhile, Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani have partnered to sell automotive fuels by leveraging each other's fuel retail networks -- marking the second business collaboration between the two billionaire industrialists.

Alongside, ATGL -- the equal city gas joint venture of Adani Group and TotalEnergies of France -- will put up CNG dispensing units at Jio-bp's fuel pumps, according to a joint statement on Wednesday.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.59 per cent, and the midcap index surged 0.63 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, teck surged 1.69 per cent, BSE Focused IT (1.69 per cent), IT (1.68 per cent), telecommunication (1.42 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.26 per cent), consumer durables (1.26 per cent) and healthcare (1.11 per cent).

In contrast, Capital Goods and oil & gas were the laggards.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.21 per cent to USD 67.95 a barrel. —*PTI*

Ambani, Adani join hands on fuel marketing business

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani have partnered to sell automotive fuels by leveraging each other's fuel retail networks – marking the second business collaboration between the two billionaire industrialists.

Ambani's fuel venture with UK's BP, Jio-bp, will set up petrol and diesel dispensers at CNG retail outlets of Adani Total Gas Ltd (ATGL). Alongside, ATGL – the equal city gas joint venture of Adani Group and TotalEnergies of France – will put up CNG dispensing units at Jio-bp's fuel pumps, they said in a joint statement on Wednesday.

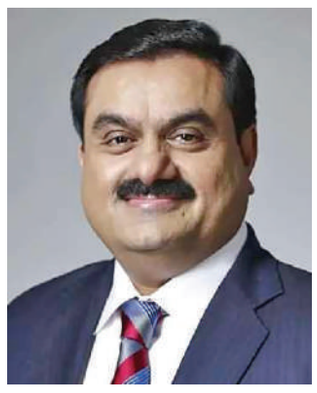
The partnership will cover both group's existing as well as future outlets.

Jio-bp owns 1,972 petrol pumps across the country while ATGL operates a network of 650 CNG stations in 34 geographical areas.

"Adani Total Gas Ltd and Jio-bp (operating brand of Reliance BP Mobility Ltd) today (Wednesday) announced signing of an agreement to redefine the auto fuel retail experience for Indian consumers.

"Under this partnership, select ATGL fuel outlets will offer Jio-bp's high-performance liquid fuels (petrol and diesel), while select Jio-bp fuel outlets will integrate ATGL's CNG dispensing units, within ATGL's authorised geographical areas, thus enhancing the supply of high-quality fuels to transport consumers," the statement said.

This is the second time in recent months that the rival billionaires have come together. —*PTI*



The partnership will cover both group's existing as well as future outlets, they said in a joint statement on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

HDB IPO GETS 37% SUBSCRIPTION ON DAY-1 OF BIDDING

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The initial public offer of HDB Financial Services Ltd, a subsidiary of HDFC Bank, received 37 per cent subscription on the first day of bidding on Wednesday.

The initial share sale got bids for 4,85,98,380 shares against 13,04,42,855 shares on offer, as per NSE data.

The category for non-institutional investors attracted 76 per cent subscription while the quota for Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) got subscribed 30 per cent. Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) quota got subscribed 1 per cent.

HDB Financial Services mopped up Rs 3,369 crore from anchor investors.

The Rs 12,500-crore initial public offering (IPO) will conclude on 27 June. The price band for the offer has been fixed at Rs 700-740 per share.

At the upper end of the price band, the company is valued at nearly Rs 61,400 crore. —*PTI*

ASSAM WORST AFFECTED

Iran-Israel clash hits orthodox tea exports hard

JORHAT, 25 JUNE

The ongoing Iran-Israel conflict has severely disrupted India's Orthodox tea exports, particularly disrupting business from Assam, the country's largest producer of Orthodox tea.

Iran, a key buyer of Indian Orthodox tea. imports nearly 28 million kilos annually, of which around 24 million kilos are sourced from Assam. With Assam producing roughly 85 million kilos of Orthodox tea each year, this disruption has jeopardised a significant portion of the state's exports.

Indian Orthodox tea refers to tea processed using the traditional method, which involves hand-plucking, withering, rolling, oxidation, and drying.

Exporters report major delays and complications in both shipments and payment settlements since the war began. These disruptions have triggered a steep fall in Orthodox tea prices at recent auctions, causing deep concern among tea growers and manufacturers, especially in Assam.

According to observers, what's raising eyebrows within the industry is that Sri Lanka -- another major supplier of Orthodox tea to Iran -- has not seen a similar sharp market decline.

Industry experts suggest this may be because Sri Lankan exporters are not exploiting the crisis, or the Sri Lankan government is actively stepping in to stabilise the sector.

While the current turmoil is expected to be temporary, the uncertainty is putting immense pressure on Orthodox tea producers.

Industry bodies are urging the central government to provide immediate relief and take policy-level steps to support the tea sector during this volatile period. —*ANI*

Iran imports nearly 28 million kilos of tea annually, of which around 24 million kilos are sourced from Assam PHOTO: PTI

RBI extends market timings for call money

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

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The market timings for call money will be extended by two hours to 7pm with effect from 1 July, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Wednesday.

The RBI had set up the Working Group under Chairperson of Radha Shyam Ratho to undertake a comprehensive review of trading and settlement timings of financial markets regulated by the central bank. Based on the committee's recommendations, as well as the feedback received, the RBI decided to change the market timings for call money to 7pm with effect from 1 July, 2025.

"Accordingly, the revised market hours shall be from 9am to 7pm," it said.

Also, the trading hours of market repo and Tri-Party Repo (TREP) shall be from 9am to 4pm from 1 August, 2025.—*PTI*

BBIL, GSK plan malaria vaccine at half price

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Bharat Biotech International Ltd (BBIL) and GSK plc on Wednesday said they will reduce the price of the world's first malaria vaccine for children 'RTS,S' developed by GSK, PATH and partners, by more than half to less than USD 5 by 2028.

Announced as part of their commitment to the Vaccine Alliance (Gavi), the two companies said the price reduction is driven by process improvements, expanded production capacity, cost-effective manufacturing, and minimal profit margins.

The announcement forms part of pledges to Gavi for its next replenishment phase by both companies, they said.

"This pledge to Gavi 6.0 is more than a pricing announcement. It is a commitment to global equity, innovation, and collaboration.

Through this historic announcement, we aim to change the course of malaria burden for millions of children and families," BBIL Executive Chairman Krishna Ella said.

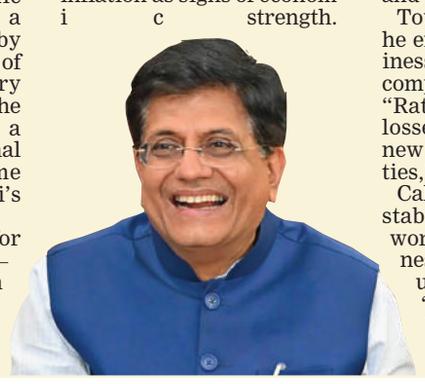
Further, he said, "By joining forces with GSK, and working closely with Gavi, and the WHO, we are taking a real step toward closing the gap between vaccine supply and the urgent needs of children at risk of malaria." —*PTI*

India nearing $5T growth goal: Goyal

KOLKATA, 25 JUNE

Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said India is firmly on course to becoming a $5 trillion economy by 2027, despite global economic challenges. Speaking at a virtual session hosted by the Merchants' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Goyal credited the country's progress to a decade of transformational reforms under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

"This is not a time for incremental change—we've aimed for quantum leaps," he stated. Goyal highlighted how India has moved from being part of the 'Fragile Five' to ranking among the world's top five economies. He cited robust foreign exchange reserves of $698 billion, strong banking sector health, and historically low inflation as signs of economic strength.



Goyal also praised recent free trade agreements (FTAs) with developed economies like the UK, Australia, and the EU, calling them complementary and beneficial for Indian exporters and MSMEs.

Touching on technology, he emphasised India's readiness to lead in AI, quantum computing, and 3D printing. "Rather than fearing job losses, we must embrace new employment opportunities," he said.

Calling India an "oasis of stability" in a turbulent world, Goyal urged businesses to innovate, scale up, and drive exports. "India's growth story belongs to all of us," he concluded. —*PTI*

Rama Telecom IPO opens

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The initial public offering (IPO) of Rama Telecom, a telecom infrastructure and engineering solutions provider, opened for subscription on Wednesday. The IPO priced in the range of Rs 65–68 per equity share, will remain open until June 27. At the upper end of the price band, Rama Telecom will fetch about Rs 25.13 crore, the company said.

Shares of the company will be listed on the NSE's SME platform Emerge and the investors can bid for a minimum of 2,000 equity shares and in multiples thereof, it added. The IPO is entirely a fresh issue of 36.96 lakh shares with a face value to Rs 10 each. —*PTI*

CLOSE BEHIND NETFLIX

JioHotstar subscriber base touches 300M

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

Jiohotstar's overall subscriber base has touched 300 million, just shy of the global OTT giant Netflix's last reported number of 301.63 million, the domestic streaming platform said on Wednesday.

Recently concluded edition of the Tata IPL seemed to be aiding in the subscriber addition, which had stood at just 50 million in February as per a media report.

The BCCI-promoted cricket league had many firsts in 2025, including digital viewership at 652 million crossing the 537 million on television, as per a report published by its parent Jiostar, which came into being in February this year with the merger of Reliance-led Jiocinema and Disney+Hotstar.

Sanjog Gupta, the Chief Executive for sports and live experiences for Jiostar, suggested that the high viewership also translated into revenues.

There was a 5.16 per cent jump among those who watched the cricket league in the digital format -- then known as Jiocinema -- from 620 million last year.

It can be noted that in February, Jiostar had just 50 million subscribers which raced to 280 million by May with start of the cricketing league, as per a media report.

The overall reach of IPL across digital and TV mediums for Jiostar stood at 1.19 billion, and the average daily reach touched 121 million on TV and 170 million on digital platforms, the report said.

On the digital front, the reach on the streaming platform Jiohotstar stood at 652 million, while the same on connected TV was 235 million and 417 million watched it on mobile phones.

The company's report said Jiostar had 1.04 billion downloads on Android, as per the report.

The overall watch time on television had stood at 514 billion minutes, the report said. —*PTI*

Recently concluded edition of the Tata IPL seemed to be aiding in the subscriber addition PHOTO: PTI

Jio was biggest risk of my life, says Mukesh

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

- Mukesh Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries, reflected on the need to believe in future-facing businesses

Billionaire industrialist Mukesh Ambani has called Reliance Jio's 2016 launch the "biggest risk" of his life, saying even if it had failed financially, it would still have been worth it for transforming India digitally. Speaking to McKinsey & Co, Ambani said Reliance invested billions of its own funds in building a nationwide 4G network, despite analysts warning India wasn't ready for such advanced technology.

"I told my board, in the worst-case scenario, we may not earn much. But it would be the greatest act of philanthropy we could do—digitising India," he said.

Jio disrupted the telecom market by offering free calls and cheap data, triggering a price war and making the internet accessible to millions, including rural and low-income users. India now has over 800 million internet users.

Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries, reflected on the need to believe in future-facing businesses.

"Reliance must outlive us," he said, recalling his father Dhirubhai Ambani's words. He emphasised institutional culture, ethical leadership, and readiness for worst-case scenarios as key to managing risk and building a legacy. —*PTI*

World Pickleball League launches WPBL On Tour

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

The World Pickleball League (WPBL) on Wednesday announced the launch of 'WPBL On Tour', a series of off-season events including a multi-city tournament to grow the sport across the country.This off-season initiative of franchise-led tournaments and events is aimed at expanding the community engagement of the sport, which enjoyed some success in the first season of of WPBL.'WPBL on Tour' will be held in the six franchise cities over a span of four months with plus days of on-ground engagement. Each WPBL franchise will play host to a city-based tournament in their home territory, which shall see the league assist with strategic, marketing, and financial support.The World Pickleball League will enable the franchise to organise tournaments that will be open to local pickleball players and enthusiasts, and offer an opportunity to them to compete under the banner of their city's team.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Anish and Sift win in national selection trials

DEHRADUN, 25 JUNE

Olympians Anish Bhanwala, Sift Kaur Samra, and junior world championship medallist Umamahesh Maddineni won the national selection trials (T3) for Group 'A' athletes in the men's 25m rapid fire, women's 50m 3 position, and 10m air rifle events, respectively, here on Wednesday. The trials are being held at the Trishul Shooting Range in Maharana Pratap Sports College. Anish shot 33 in the finals, four better than his statemate Adarsh Singh, who finished in second place while Navy's Pradeep Singh Shekhawat took the third place with a score of 23. Earlier, Anish added 289 in Stage 2 of qualification after he had shot 293 in Stage 1 on Tuesday to qualify for the final in first place with a total of 582.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Lalit Babu wins Mumbai Int'l GM Chess title

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

India's Lalit Babu clinched the Mumbai International Grandmaster Chess tournament title after pipping Mamikon Gharibyan of Armenia based on a higher tie-break score on Wednesday.Grandmaster Babu won his ninth and final round match against top seeded Georgian GM Lavin Pantsulaia to accumulate eight points. But, he had to spend some anxious moments as Gharibyan also tallied eight points after winning his final match against Indian GM Neeloptal Das.—*PTI*

Gavaskar slams India's poor show after Leeds Test loss

2nd Test of the series will be played in Birmingham from 2 July

LEEDS, 25 JUNE

Former India cricketer Sunil Gavaskar has asked the Indian team players to buckle up and give it their all in practice after they suffered a humiliating 5-wicket loss to England in the first Test in Leeds of the five-match series.

India failed to defend 371 runs, as Ben Duckett's 149 led the way for England to 1-0 up in the series. It was India's seventh defeat in the last 12 Test matches and third in a row. The second Test of the series will be played in Birmingham from 2nd July onwards.

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar believed that India's defeat was solely due to poor fielding, even though most of the criticism focused on the batting collapse across the two innings and Jasprit Bumrah's lack of help from his fellow quicks.

During the five days of play, the dropped catches were mentioned, but Gavaskar was also incensed at the fielding mistakes. By claiming that the Headingley track was batting-friendly, he put an end to the discussion about the subpar bowling."Full credit to England. Despite India having five centurions, they seemed to have that confidence. That is what made them take the final wickets. So that is where India also missed out because those extra runs could have made the difference. —*PTI*

Shubman Gill reacts after getting out during India vs England 1st Test PHOTO: PTI

SHASTRI WANTS GAMBHIR TO SHOW NO MERCY

LEEDS, 25 JUNE

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri pulled no punches after the team's five-wicket defeat to England in the first Test at Headingley, urging Gautam Gambhir to take a tough stand in the dressing room. speaking to Sky Sports Cricket, Shastri said Gambhir must address the team's issues firmly and hold individuals accountable for repeated mistakes, suggesting that he should even "tick off" players if required. The fielding errors were glaring; India dropped five catches in England's first innings alone, with Yashasvi Jaiswal putting down four across the match. Several of those were pivotal moments that allowed English batters to regain control and swing the momentum. The problems didn't end there. Despite dominant top-order performances in both innings, India's lower-middle order collapsed twice, allowing England to claw back into the match and eventually take the game away. —*PTI*

India needs to relook at lower-order batting: Shubman

LEEDS, 25 JUNE

India captain Shubman Gill admitted the lower-order collapse in both innings did cost them dearly during the five-wicket defeat against England in the opening Test.

Despite vice-captain Rishabh Pant scoring centuries in each innings of the opening Tests and other key batters in openers KL Rahul, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Gill himself hitting their respective tons, India failed to get to bigger totals in both innings and also dropped crucial catches. This is the first time in the history of Indian cricket that a team lost a Test after five individual hundreds being scored by its batters.

"That (lower-order contribution) was something we spoke about. (But) It (collapse happened so quickly. (It) could be one of those things we have to rectify in the upcoming matches," he said.

Harshit Rana released from Indian squad, not taken to Birmingham

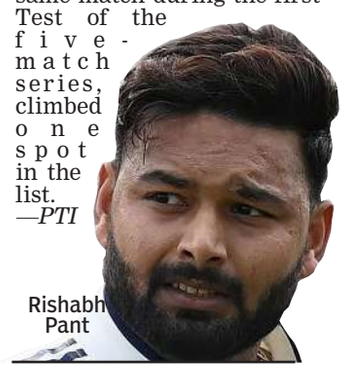
Young speedster Harshit Rana, who was added as a cover to the Indian squad for the opening Test against England at Leeds, has been released by the team management on Wednesday.

Rana, who played two Tests in Australia with modest results, was a part of India A squad but hardly made an impact in the unofficial Test against England Lions in Canterbury where he was hit for 99 runs for a solitary wicket in 27 overs.

Harshit Rana has been released from the squad. He hasn't travelled with the Indian squad to Birmingham for the second Test BCCI source told PTI on condition of anonymity.

Rishabh Pant reaches career-high 7th in ICC Test rankings

India's swashbuckling wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant reached a career-high seventh in the latest ICC Test rankings for batters on Wednesday, following his twin centuries in the series opener against England in Leeds. India's new Test captain Gill jumped five rungs to 20th overall following his century in the first innings of the match that his team lost by five wickets despite setting England a stiff target of 371. Pant, who became only the second wicketkeeper to hit two hundreds in the same match during the first Test of the five-match series, climbed one spot in the list. —*PTI*



Rishabh Pant

The registration process is open till mid-July PHOTO: PTI

400 athletes register for Shooting League

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The upcoming inaugural Shooting League of India (SLI) is generating plenty of interest as more than 400 athletes have already registered for the event, organisers National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) said on Wednesday.

Shooters from India, Kazakhstan, Russia, Iran, Hungary, Croatia, Azerbaijan, the United Kingdom, Australia, Grenada, Italy, Australia, Austria, Serbia, the USA, Spain, Thailand, Germany, the Czech Republic, Norway, San Marino, and Romania have registered for the league, and the number continues to grow. Expressing his excitement, NRAI President Shri Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo said, "We are truly delighted by the overwhelming response and the number of registrations we have received.

"It's a strong validation of our vision for the Shooting League of India. Our aim has always been to create a world-class platform that celebrates talent, promotes healthy competition, and inspires the next generation of shooters." The registration process is open till mid-July. The first season of the SLI will have a window between November 20 and December 2, 2025 and will feature mixed team events across pistol (10m, 25m), rifle (10m, 50m 3 positions), and shotgun (trap and skeet), as outlined by the NRAI technical committee.

A minimum of six teams will participate in the competition, divided into two pools during the league stage.

Players will be selected and grouped into four tiers: elite champions, world elite, national champions, and junior and youth champions to ensure a competitive mix of experience and emerging talent. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Lalit Babu wins Mumbai Int'l GM Chess title

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

India's Lalit Babu clinched the Mumbai International Grandmaster Chess tournament title after pipping Mamikon Gharibyan of Armenia based on a higher tie-break score on Wednesday.Grandmaster Babu won his ninth and final round match against top seeded Georgian GM Lavin Pantsulaia to accumulate eight points. But, he had to spend some anxious moments as Gharibyan also tallied eight points after winning his final match against Indian GM Neeloptal Das.—*PTI*

Montrezl Harrell and Troy fail doping tests

BEIJING, 25 JUNE

The Chinese Anti-Doping Agency has released the names of two American basketball players who failed in-competition tests in April during the domestic league. In a statement released on Tuesday, the Chinese Basketball Association said it had been notified by the agency of doping violations involving Montrezl Dashay Harrell and Troy Akeem Gillenwater. It said both players tested positive for Carboxy-THC and that both have given up the right to have their "B" samples tested. The CBA said it will impose penalties on the players once the anti-doping agency makes a final decision on the case. —*PTI*

Chelsea beat Esperance 3-0 to reach Club World Cup last 16

LONDON, 25 JUNE

Liam Delap scored his first Chelsea goal in a 3-0 win over Tunisian champions Esperance on Tuesday, which took the Blues into the last 16 of the Club World Cup.

A game played in sweaty conditions at the end of a blisteringly hot day in Philadelphia was decided by two goals in first-half stoppage time by Tosin Adarabioyo and then Delap.

Tyrique George added the third in injury time at the end of the game in front of 32,937 fans at Lincoln Financial Field as Enzo Maresca's side bounced back from a 3-1 loss to Flamengo.

Chelsea clinched second place in Group D behind the Brazilian giants, while Esperance were eliminated.

Asked about Delap's first goal on his third appearance, Maresca said: "Against Flamengo, he had three clear chances to score a goal, so that means he is there, in the right position, he is doing well.

"We know Liam is going to score goals with us, we don't have any doubts about that."

The Premier League outfit will now travel to Charlotte to face Benfica on Saturday, with the Portuguese club having earlier beaten Bayern Munich to top Group C.

That will be the first meeting of the clubs since Chelsea beat Benfica in the 2013 Europa League final, and the winner of that tie will play either Palmeiras or Botafogo of Brazil in the last eight. —*PTI*

Chelsea's English defender #04 Tosin Adarabioyo celebrates after scoring the opening goal PHOTO: X/@CHELSEAFC

Flamengo happy to progress after 1-1 draw

LONDON, 25 JUNE

Misfiring Flamengo was held to a 1-1 draw by Los Angeles FC in their final group match at the Club World Cup on Tuesday, but the Brazilian side still goes into the knockout stage with some momentum after another strong performance.

Denis Bouanga put the MLS club ahead in the 84th minute, but substitute Wallace Yan responded two minutes later to ensure Flamengo would progress unbeaten to its last-16 tie against Bayern Munich in Miami on Sunday.

With top spot in Group D already assured, Flamengo coach Filipe Luis made seven changes to his starting side, but there was no change to the style that already earned the Rio de Janeiro club wins over Chelsea and Esperance.

With a little more accuracy in front of the goal, the side would have comfortably beaten an LAFC side which was already condemned to a group stage exit after losing its first two games without scoring a goal.

"We had a great group stage," Felipe Luis told reporters. "We achieved our objective early, so we've been able to bench players with yellow cards and give minutes to players that hadn't played yet.

"We had rhythm, and we had chances to score. Unfortunately, it didn't happen. We are very happy.—*PTI*

Hugo Lloris of LAFC saves an attempt on goal during the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 match against Flamengo PHOTO: X/@FLAMENGO_EN

CLUB WORLD CUP

IJMH team beats Australia 2-1 to finish third

BERLIN, 25 JUNE

The Indian junior men's hockey team defeated Australia 2-1 in the battle for third place at the 4 Nations Tournament here on Wednesday.

Rohit (45') provided the equaliser for India before Ajeet Yadav's (52') fourth-quarter goal sealed the win.

Earlier, Captain Toby Mallon had given Australia the lead in the second half.

Both teams were locked in a tense battle through the first half, with neither side managing to find the back of the net in the opening two quarters.

Strong defensive structures and disciplined play from both ends ensured that goal-scoring opportunities were not converted, keeping the scores level heading into the third quarter.

Australia, eventually, struck in the third quarter when Toby Mallon scored a field goal to put them ahead 1-0 in the 40th minute.

India responded swiftly, finding the equaliser just five minutes later. It was Rohit who scored following a penalty corner to restore parity.

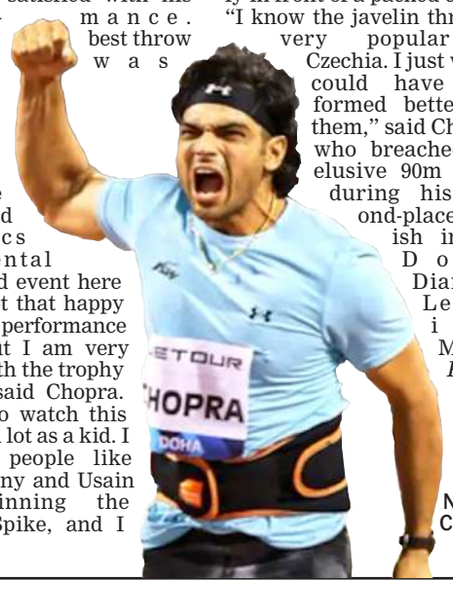
With momentum on their side, India rallied to find the winner in the final quarter. In the 52nd minute, Ajeet Yadav found the back of the net in open play to give India the lead and secure the victory.

The win marks the end of India's campaign in the 4 Nations Tournament. —*PTI*

Wish I could have performed better: Neeraj

OSTRAVA, 25 JUNE

Neeraj Chopra may have clinched the Golden Spike title in his maiden appearance at the meet, but the former Olympic champion was far from satisfied with his performance. Chopra's best throw of 85.29m was enough to secure the win in a nine-man field at the World Athletics Continental Tour Gold event here ."I am not that happy with my performance today, but I am very happy with the trophy I won," said Chopra. "I used to watch this meeting a lot as a kid. I watched people like Jan Zelezny and Usain Bolt winning the Golden Spike, and I dreamt of winning one as well. Now the dream has come true," the double Olympic-medallist added. Though he led the field, Chopra admitted he fell short of his expectations, especially in front of a packed crowd. "I know the javelin throw is very popular in Czechia. I just wish I could have performed better for them," said Chopra, who breached the elusive 90m mark during his second-place finish in the Doha Diamond League in May.—*PTI*



Neeraj Chopra

PRODIGY FROM DELHI

9-yr-old Aarit Kapil holds Carlsen to a draw

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Nine-year-old Aarit Kapil from Delhi came close to defeating world No. 1 Magnus Carlsen before settling for a draw in the 'Early Titled Tuesday' chess tournament held on a leading online platform.

Aarit, the runner-up at the recent Under-9 National Championship, matched the five-time world champion move for move and had Carlsen in a completely lost position.

But with time running out and only a few seconds left on his clock, the young Indian was unable to convert his advantage and eventually forced a draw in a rook versus two minor pieces endgame.

Aarit played this event from his hotel in Georgia, where he is currently battling for a podium finish in the under-10 World Championship.

Aarit has scored victories in the first two rounds and will play his third game on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, India's V Pranav clinched the 'Early Titled Tuesday' title with an impressive 10 out of 11 points.

American Grandmaster Hans Moke Niemann and Carlsen both finished with 9.5 points, but Niemann secured second place on tie-break. —*PTI*

Aarit Kapil

Magnus Carlsen